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PEREIRA**

**A PARCERIA DE TIM BURTON E JOHNNY DEPP E  
A SUA INFLUÊNCIA NO CINEMA MODERNO**

**THE BURTON/ DEPP PARTNERSHIP AND ITS  
INFLUENCE ON MODERN CINEMA**

**DOCUMENTO  
DEFINITIVO**



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dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Línguas, Literaturas e Culturas - Estudos Ingleses realizada sob a orientação científica do Prof. Dr. Anthony David Barker, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.

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Aos meus pais pelo incentivo constante, conselhos e incansável apoio.

Ao Tiago pelos momentos de descontração imprescindíveis.

**o júri**  
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## palavras-chave

Tim Burton, parceria, Johnny Depp, influência, cinema moderno, estúdios de Hollywood.

## resumo

O presente trabalho pretende desvendar o singular universo cinematográfico de Tim Burton, autor de personagens e paisagens predominantemente góticas. Ao mesmo tempo, propõe-se descortinar o seu contributo para o cinema moderno através da colaboração regular que o realizador tem mantido com o ator Johnny Depp ao longo dos últimos vinte anos. O ponto de partida para este estudo compreende uma breve apresentação das origens, interesses e início da carreira do realizador e do ator no primeiro capítulo. De seguida, e no mesmo capítulo, são analisados os filmes resultantes da parceria entre o realizador e o ator dando-se especial relevo aos temas e elementos iconográficos mais frequentes e à influência que os filmes de terror gótico alcançaram na filmografia do realizador. No segundo capítulo, a carreira cinematográfica do ator Johnny Depp é alvo de análise discutindo-se o tipo de personagens que o ator protagoniza e a sua colaboração com vários realizadores do cinema atual, em particular a sua parceria com Burton. São ainda discutidas neste capítulo, as razões que conduziram ao sucesso artístico e comercial deste par. O terceiro capítulo centra-se na apreciação alargada da obra do realizador e a influência dos seus filmes no cinema contemporâneo através do ressurgimento de personagens bizarras e da perpetuação de mundos esteticamente irreais e sombrios próprios da cultura do gótico (em particular do *teen* gótico). A revitalização de técnicas de animação de *stop-motion* e a apropriação e subversão da narrativa do conto de fadas tradicional na obra de Tim Burton são também objeto de estudo neste último capítulo. Finalmente, a análise feita à ligação do realizador com os estúdios de Hollywood permite fazer uma apreciação crítica e chegar à conclusão que desta parceria profissional resultam filmes com um cunho pessoal que são, em simultâneo, comercialmente bem sucedidos e favoravelmente aceites pela crítica cinematográfica em geral.

**keywords**

Tim Burton, partnership, Johnny Depp, influence, modern cinema, Hollywood studio system.

**abstract**

In this work I intend to show Tim Burton's peculiar filmic universe as an author of stereotypical characters and dark gothic atmospheres. Meanwhile, I also intend to unveil Burton's contribution to modern cinema through his regular working collaboration with the actor Johnny Depp over the last twenty years. Starting first with a brief introduction to their childhood and family backgrounds, interests and formative years, I proceed to examine their common filmography as well as Burton's most recurrent themes and iconography in the first chapter, including the influence of gothic horror films on Burtonian cinematic universe. The spotlight of the second chapter is a brief analysis on Johnny Depp's acting career, thus discussing his portrayal of a certain typology of leading characters, along with his working collaboration with several contemporary directors, particularly his partnership with Burton. The reasons behind this working team's artistic and commercial success are also discussed in this chapter. The third chapter will focus on an extended appreciation of Burton's work and its influence on contemporary cinema as is illustrated by the resurgence of bizarre characters or monsters and heavily stylized unrealistic dark universes properly identifiable within contemporary gothic culture (particularly the *teen gothic*). The revival of stop-motion animation film techniques along with Burton's appropriation and plot subversion of the traditional fairy tale in his films are also discussed in this last chapter. Finally, by examining the director's working relationship within the Hollywood studio system, I arrive at the conclusion that Burton has been able to produce personal films that are nevertheless commercially successful and critically acclaimed by reviewers.

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## Introduction

Recently, at the 69<sup>th</sup> Golden Globe Awards Ceremony, 2012, the presenter and British comedian actor Ricky Gervais introduced Johnny Depp as “the biggest movie star on the planet”, “the man who would wear literally anything Tim Burton tells him to”<sup>1</sup>. This is a recurrent situation whenever the names of Johnny Depp or Tim Burton are mentioned in today’s cinema. Both actor and director are such a powerful and popular team<sup>2</sup> that they have established one of the strongest, most creative and mutually supportive working relationships in contemporary cinema, resembling some of the best actor/director collaborations the cinema ever brought together: Alfred Hitchcock/ Cary Grant and James Stewart; John Ford/John Wayne; Federico Fellini/Marcello Mastroianni; Martin Scorsese/Robert De Niro; David Lynch/Kyle MacLachlan.

Tim Burton is recognized for working, almost loyally, with the same actors “when you work with somebody more than once there’s a sense of trust. It’s great, because you don’t have to verbalize, you don’t have to talk about every single thing.”(Salisbury 176) And of all the actors with whom he has worked, no actor has a better relationship with Tim Burton than Johnny Depp, “I feel close to Johnny because I think somewhere inside we respond to similar things.” (Salisbury 138) Together they have built a very collaborative partnership integrating the actor’s chameleonic acting into the director’s unique conceptual visual style to create their eight films to date: *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Ed Wood* (1994), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), *Tim Burton’s Corpse Bride* (2005), *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and *Dark Shadows* (2012). To examine how this has come about, we must first establish the personal and professional relationship between the actor and the director. Thus, in the first chapter of this work, there will be a brief introduction of Burton’s and Depp’s childhood, family and social backgrounds, followed by a close analysis of their common filmography. Burton’s cinematic work is autobiographical since it contains references to his childhood and formative years as well as his fascination for horror films and film idols. Many of his films’ most recurrent themes and iconography

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<sup>1</sup> 69<sup>th</sup> Golden Globe Awards, 2012 January 27<sup>th</sup>, Johnny Depp was in Los Angeles at the time to present the nomination of Martin Scorsese’s film *Hugo* for Best Motion Picture – Drama, produced by Depp’s production company Infinitum Nihil. His company also produced Tim Burton’s *Dark Shadows* (2012), the main character in which is a role belonging to Johnny Depp.

<sup>2</sup> In September 2010 the newspaper *The Guardian*, listed them as numbers 11 and 17 in its Hollywood A-list of most powerful people in the film industry. < <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/sep/24/film-power-100-full-list#history-link-box>>

(including the use of gothic traditional elements from popular horror films) are also examined in this chapter.

Gothic has always been present in cinema. It is a difficult concept to define as it blurs the boundaries of several film genres such as horror, comedy, drama, fantasy. The term Gothic first appeared to describe the Northern European people who put an end to the Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, Gothic was a derogatory term and meant being barbarian or primitive (the peoples from Northern Europe) as opposed to being civilized (the Romans). As a literary genre Gothic was first introduced in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and represented a reaction against the Enlightenment, which was focused on the benefits of science and reason. According to Fred Botting in his book with the same title, Gothic “signifies a writing of excess” (Botting 1) and its “characteristics like extravagance, superstition, fancy and wildness (...) became associated, in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with a more expansive and imaginative potential for aesthetic production.” (Botting 22) Henry Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Ann Radcliffe’s novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) became recognized as the first Gothic works that began the tradition of fantastic literature. Since then, Gothic has been defined by the use of such elements as crumbling castles, mansions or abbeys, old cemeteries or graveyards, the night, distorted and threatening environments, after-life supernatural characters (ghosts) and persecuted heroines.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of these gothic themes changed. Gothic turned into a more mental and emotional state rather than a physical one. There is a concern with the darker side of human life such as death, insanity, perversion, obsessive desire, the grotesque<sup>3</sup>, the supernatural and the occult. Sudden violence, criminality, physical imprisonment, historical nostalgia or the interference of the past with the present, the consequences of technological advances or the implications of science in our world became recurrent themes in gothic novels. The main characters are simultaneously victims and villains. They are monsters, vampires or simply isolated, rebellious and alienated social outcasts. Some of the most famous gothic novels written during this period were Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).

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<sup>3</sup> There are several modern theorists who explained this recurrent Gothic element in literature and cinema. Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, associates the grotesque with Middle Ages and the Carnival. During this popular feast, social order is reversed and everything is allowed. Disruptive laughter and Grotesque expressions that deal with the low body parts and their functions are encouraged since it frees man from the constraints of civilization that distorts out the true humanity and provides him with a new vision of social existence. In Spooner, Catherine. *Contemporary Gothic*. London: Reaktion Books, 2006.pp.66-69

Indeed, 19<sup>th</sup> century gothic novel's major themes and leading characters, as well as its iconography, have always had an imaginative hold on American culture. American gothic authors, such as Washington Irving and Edgar Allan Poe, described disturbing portrayals of the human condition by using gothic themes such as anxiety and fear of physical and social isolation and psychological alienation and imprisonment. Thus, the American gothic has frequently been characterized as exploring the dark side of the American dream of liberty and transcendence.

The birth of cinema on the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has allowed directors to explore 19<sup>th</sup> century gothic literary themes or motifs and introduce them to American theatre audiences. Several American horror films, especially those from Hollywood's Universal studios in the 1930s and 1940s, were mostly inspired by well-known 19<sup>th</sup> century novels, thus, producing iconic film versions such as James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) and Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931).

Nowadays, there is a resurgence of Gothic in many different areas: film, literature, music, fashion and art. Gothic images are ubiquitous in contemporary culture. Indeed, there is a revivification of the motifs of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic in contemporary Hollywood. Contemporary Gothic seldom fails to be entertaining. It appeals to the contemporary lust for spectacle and sensation and, at the same time, it offers a genuine and incisive comment on the world. Mostly based on Anne Rice's vampire saga and Stephen King's psychological thrillers, American modern Gothic cinema can be both comic and tragic, erudite or trashy, sinister or silly, psychological or visceral. It provides pleasurable suspense and luxurious terror. Many gothic horror films like *Halloween* (1978) or *Scream* (1996), also known as slasher or splatter movies, show images of abjection<sup>4</sup> and gory-heavy ambience in which the monster creatures are cannibalistic, zombies or serial killers.

Johnny Depp, who began his career in a slasher film, has been recognized as one of the most talented actors of his generation. From TV teen idol to iconic star, he has portrayed innumerable and idiosyncratic characters that are widely popular among mass

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<sup>4</sup>In her work *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (1982), Julia Kristeva argues that images of abjection are recurrent in our culture, foremost of which is the corpse, whole and mutilated, followed by an array of bodily wastes such as blood, urine, vomit, and pus. The body protects itself from these substances by ejecting them. She also emphasizes that there is an attraction as well as a horror or repulsion of the corpse. Faced with a corpse, a person would most likely be repelled because a corpse means that we are capable of dying ourselves. This repulsion created by the sight of death, excrement and rot constitutes the subject as a living being in the symbolic order. Since the abject is situated outside the symbolic order, being forced to face it (the symbolic order) is an inherently traumatic experience. In Donald, James. *Fantasy and the Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 1989.pp.65-70

theatre audiences. Edward Scissorhands was the first of many quirky characters to introduce Depp as a serious character actor. His performances as well as his chameleonic acting skills have been highly acclaimed by reviewers. In the second chapter, there is a brief presentation of the actor's work which includes his choice of a certain typology of characters and the reasons behind the portrayal of such characters. An extended appreciation of his collaboration with independent filmmakers like Emir Kusturica and Jim Jamursch and maverick directors like Tim Burton and Roman Polanski will also be in the second chapter.

In the third chapter, there will be a focus on Burton's contribution to modern cinema. Burton has been regarded by his peers and reviewers as one of the most influential Hollywood contemporary directors to produce films that are linked to the fairy tale narrative story-telling tradition. Burton explores Disney's latest versions of Perrault's and The Grimm Brothers' fairy tales and subverts their narrative codes.

He has also evoked Gothic traditions by perpetuating their most striking images, motifs and narrative structures in modern cinema. Through his twisted and personal fantasies or nightmares, Burton has managed so far to create a unique gothic style in his films, one that includes stylistically peculiar gloomy universes, remarkably elaborated visual settings, comic violent atmospheres and sometimes an alternate narrative discourse. Furthermore, Burton was able to create characters that are either misfits and alienated social outsiders or monsters so that he, in a way, could offer social criticism in his films. In truly Burtonian fashion, his films are a hybrid form of the transmutation of the gothic male characters - Frankenstein and Dracula - the German Expressionism and Pop Surrealist iconography and comic-violent or wicked humor. It tends to be more cinematic than horrific. It is an intellectualized cinema inspired by his own childhood cinematic memories of Universal, Roger Corman and Hammer horror films.

Although he is recognized worldwide as a film *auteur*-director by mainstream media, he has a *modus Vivendi* with the Hollywood studio system. Therefore, in this last chapter, it is also important to conduct a close examination of how Burton's popularity and influence on modern cinema is also directly associated with his working relationship within the Hollywood studio system.

## Chapter I – Tim Burton and Johnny Depp

### 1. Childhood, interests and early life

As far as their personal lives are concerned, there isn't much information about both artists' childhood and teenage years, except from some significant events that were gathered along by some newspapers and magazines articles and according to the actor's/director's own words probably determined by their own agency publicists. Nevertheless, most of Tim Burton's films seem to offer much insight of his childhood. In fact, there is always some reference to his early life in his work. Allison Abbate, the producer of Tim Burton's second feature-length stop-motion film *Frankenweenie* (2012), claimed recently in *Total Film* that "everything is so based on [Burton's] life, his recollection and his experience (...) he's in every frame."<sup>5</sup> Burton himself has gone on record about the uneventful nature of his early life saying, "It's weird, but the only experiences I remember from childhood are the ones which had a major impact: fearful things, like from a scary movie." (Smith& Matthews 7)

Both Burton and Depp, in a way, share similar personal life background experience: they lived in American suburban towns with archetypical working class families who had suburban lives. Burton, only five years older than Johnny Depp, was born on August 25<sup>th</sup> in 1958, in the suburban town of Burbank, California, home to the lots of most major Hollywood studios like Universal or Disney. His father, a former minor league baseball player, worked for the Burbank Park and Recreation Department, while his mother was the owner of a cat-themed gift shop. He has a younger brother, Daniel, who works as an artist and with whom he still remains permanently at odds. Burton more than once admitted that he hadn't even had a close relationship with his parents, living a very lonely existence while growing up, "I don't know if there's any real reason why I didn't get on with my parents (...) I didn't get along with my mother so much, and my father was away a lot, and I was just always remote" (Salisbury 204), leaving him to believe that the reason for that distance was his own personality, "As a child I was very introverted (...)When you don't have many friends and you don't have a social life... you're at a distance from the real society." (Woods 5) This distance from society was even more

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<sup>5</sup> "2012 Preview – *Frankenweenie*", *Total Film*, February, 2012, issue 189, p.98.

stressed when one is reminded that there were incidents of being forced to stay in his room at home and by a peculiar episode that Burton often recalls from his childhood: when he was a young boy, his parents decided to wall up two windows in his bedroom from which Burton enjoyed a nice view of his house's lawn, giving the young Burton a little slit window that he had to climb up on a desk to look outside at his own neighborhood. This episode was later described in his first short animated picture *Vincent* (1982) (Fig.1), in which the seven-year-old boy was sent to his room and in there he imagined himself as one of Edgar Allan Poe's victims walled in and buried alive inside one of the castle's walls. According to Burton, "those were my forms of connection to the world around me. It's a mysterious place, Burbank." (Salisbury 4) Estranged and alienated from his family, between the ages of twelve and sixteen, he eventually moved in with his grandmother. Later, he would live in a small apartment whose rent he paid by working in a restaurant as a waiter after school.



Fig.1 Burton's first short stop-motion picture and film debut as a director, *Vincent* (1982).

When he's asked by interviewers about his childhood, Johnny Depp doesn't say much, stating that he "was a weird kid" who "just didn't fit anywhere." (Robb 11-12) Instead, he often suggests that he usually filters his real life into "reel" life through the misfit characters he plays, reinventing, therefore, his childhood in the light of each part he has played. Born on June 9<sup>th</sup> 1963, in the city of Owensboro, Kentucky, Depp was the youngest of four children, with a two year-old sister, Christi, as well as a half-sister and brother named Deborah and Daniel, both the offspring of his mother's previous marriage. His father worked as a city engineer and his mother was a waitress in a local coffee house. His family moved frequently during his childhood, eventually settling in Miramar, a suburban city just outside Miami, Florida, when he was seven, "My mom just liked to move for some reason. It was hard. Depending on how far we'd move, you'd have to make

new friends.”(Meikle 24) Despite being a close family, the constant dislocations, along with his parents’ increasing financial and marriage problems, caused suffering to young Depp who always felt an outsider. As the youngest child, he was particularly affected by his parents’ ongoing animosity, withdrawing ever more into a world of his own devising in order to flee the constant quarrels. Furthermore, when Johnny Depp was fifteen, his parents divorced, a traumatic incident that led to the actor’s separation not only from his father but also from his sister, Christi. These sets of events made a huge impact on Depp who, due to the stress of dealing with these family problems, got involved in self-harm, drugs and alcohol. He has eight self-inflicted scars, a remembrance of this stage of his life. He also developed an interest in tattoos just before his parents split up, “I remember carving my initials on my arm and I’ve scarred myself from time to time since then. In a way, your body is a journal and the scars are sort of entries in it.” (Robb 15) So far, he has thirteen tattoos, each one signifying an important event or person in his life. His most famous tattoos are one of his mother’s name tattooed on his left arm and the ones of his two children, Lily Rose and Jack, tattooed over his heart and on his right forearm after their birth.

Feeling estranged and alienated, and in order to flee their daily life and its surroundings, both Burton and Depp developed similar interests by watching old horror films from Universal, such as Tod Browing’s *Dracula* (1931) or James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931) (Fig.2), monster films like *Godzilla* (1954) or *King Kong* (1933), Roger Corman and Vincent Price films, Hammer films or even sci-fi B-movies such as *Earth versus the Flying Saucers* (1956) or *The Invasion of the BodySnatchers* (1956). Burton once asserted that “if you didn’t hang out with other children or didn’t play sport, you liked monster movies, you were strange”, adding that “perception of normality was strange. For me, reality is bizarre.” (Smith & Matthews 8)



Fig.2 Boris Karloff as the monster in James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931).

Often describing themselves as being introverted and practical jokers with a dark sense of humor, Burton and Depp had no special interest in school. Burton considered those years at school as not being “the best years of my life” even having “the feeling people just got this urge to want to leave me alone for some reason, I don’t know why exactly.” (Salisbury 2) According to Depp’s accounts of his time in school, he was often referred as “a ‘dirty Indian’ because of his ethnic looks.” (Meikle 29) Therefore, it is not surprising that the young teen “wasn’t big on participating in school activities. (...) I used to skip most classes to sneak into guitar class.” (Meikle 34)

By Burton’s own account, he also survived his benignly dysfunctional family and the suburban Burbank environment by lying on the ground watching planes taking off from the nearby airport or playing and drawing at the local Burbank cemetery. For Burton, this place seemed to have “a quiet, introspective, yet electrifying atmosphere. Excitement, mystery, discovery, life and death all in one place.” (Magliozzi & He 6) Burton was so focused on his drawing that he even spent a large amount of time viewing Don Chaffey’s *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) (Fig.3) because he was fascinated by Ray Harryhausen’s stop-motion animation techniques, especially the skeletons’ battle scene. Soon his precocious drawing talents were recognized by Burbank citizens and he eventually won some competitions: a fire-prevention campaign and a poster-designing competition for the local newspaper. One of them, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, was an anti-litter design, *Crush Litter*, which was displayed everywhere on the sides of city garbage trucks.

Fig.3 Ray Harryhausen’s stop-motion techniques applied in the iconic fight with the skeletons in Don Chaffey’s *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963).



Depp also took refuge from his family problems by watching not only horror films but also reading books from the Beat generation of writers such Jack Kerouac or Allen Ginsberg. Instead of drawing, Johnny Depp developed a keen interest in punk rock music. The Clash, KISS, The Sex Pistols were some of his favourite bands, spending most of his



teen years playing the guitar. In fact, Depp was so self-involved in his music that he dropped out of school at sixteen to pursue a musical career as a punk rock guitar player. He enjoyed modest local success with his band The Kids, being the opening band for famous musicians and bands such as Iggy Pop, the B-52s and Talking Heads.

Both artists became, thus, financially independent from their own families very early on in their lives. At eighteen, Burton supported himself working in a restaurant while studying with a scholarship at the prestigious California Institute of the Arts, CalArts (the famous arts school founded by Walt Disney and Roy O. Disney) and Depp and his band The Kids set out together for Los Angeles in pursuit of a record deal and of fame and fortune.

The most extraordinary thing is that neither Burton nor Depp had ever imagined at that time that they would soon achieve such professional success as director and actor. In fact, this was far from their wildest dreams. When Burton was an established and a much sought-after director, he still refused to be called one saying, “I don’t really consider myself a director (...) I really can’t. Everything I’ve done, I have to really love it and respond to it” (Smith & Matthews 1) After being a student at CalArts, Burton was immediately employed at the Disney Animation Studios, where he began a four-year apprenticeship during which he worked as an in-betweenner, assistant animator and later as a concept artist. At CalArts, Burton’s education exposed him to traditional art history and theory such as Post-Impressionism, Pop Surrealism and German Expressionism. During his time at Disney, he learnt the craft of fairy-tale story-telling, Ray Harryhausen’s stop-motion animation techniques and to develop his own directing skills. It was also remarkably Burton’s most inspired and richest period of development, as he produced an impressive number of innovative and fresh story ideas later creating his most creative work to date that led him to direct some of his best projects. Julie Hickson, an ex-executive from Disney’s story department, was amazed by Burton’s work, “I think that if you look at Tim’s drawings, aside from the artistry involved, there’s a lot of ideas there (...) they’re really jam packed, and it’s exciting to work for someone like that”. (Woods 18) These two events were important educational opportunities for Burton’s future professional career, as they allowed him to learn the necessary techniques to become a successful animation and live-action director.

From Depp's point of view, becoming an actor was a serendipitous accident. Upon his arrival at Los Angeles, he and his band lived in a precarious financial state as success didn't come as they had initially predicted. Unlike the situation they had left behind in Florida, competition was fierce and there seemed to be more talented bands around than The Kids: "there were so many bands, it was impossible to make any money." (Meikle 39) In order to pay the rent bills and support himself at the end of each month, he was forced to search for temporary, menial jobs such as gas-station attendant, mechanic or screen printer. He also sold personalized pens to companies over the phone. Arguably, telemarketing was his first acting experience as he "got paid hundred bucks a week to lie to people" and "got very good at it." (Meikle 40) During this time, he met and became a close friend to the actor Nicholas Cage, nephew of the famous director Francis Ford Coppola. It was Cage who urged Depp to try his hand at acting, offering to put him in touch with his own agent, Ilene Feldman. Feldman then sent him for an audition for Wes Craven's film *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), which would be Johnny Depp's film debut.

Before their first encounter in 1990, Johnny Depp and Tim Burton also had in common an early and disruptive broken marriage and the dissatisfaction of working in a claustrophobic working environment where there was no place for their creative imagination or artistic talents. By the age of 20, Depp had married Lori Anne Allison, sister to his band's bass player and singer - only to divorce her after an-eighteen-month marriage. Burton married a young German artist Lena Gieseke but they eventually became separated four years later.

Disney gave Burton some freedom to work on his most personal projects, but, at the same time, he found that the mainstream Disney films he worked on as an animator were far removed from his own artistic sensibility, "I just wanted to get out. The talent was there, but they didn't have the foresight to see that people have a sense of quality and would respond to it." (Smith & Matthews 10) Furthermore, Burton was disappointed with the Mickey Mouse studio. He directed, under Disney's surveillance, two short films *Vincent* (1982) and *Frankenweenie* (1984) but, in the end, they were only once released to small local cinema theatres and haven't come into the light since then. A few years later, in 1989, when he was directing *Batman*, his first big mainstream blockbuster film, he felt frustrated by Warner Brothers' lack of confidence in him as a filmmaker, by the restrictive aesthetic style and by the enormous and constant pressure the film's producer, Jon Peters,

put him under. It was such a bad experience that Burton later recalled it as his most depressed and darkest period, and admitted that *Batman* was the one film of his he didn't feel close to due to the stress "of not having a minute, working seven days a week under really harsh conditions, not having a chance to think, not having the script sorted out." (Salisbury 102) Later, he also added that since then he has had "amnesia about certain times during the shooting." (Smith & Matthews 93) Due to the difficulties of shooting *Batman* and his inability to put a personal stamp on the film as he would have liked, Burton was disillusioned with Hollywood. At the same time, he was one of its biggest directorial stars by turning *Batman* into a commercially huge success.

Meanwhile, after his film debut in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and a small role in *Slow Burn* (1986), Johnny Depp had begun to take the whole notion of acting for a living much more seriously: "after I saw how bad I was in my first couple of jobs, I decided I'd better do something about it." (Meikle 68) He decided, therefore, to enroll in acting classes at Beverly Hills' Loft Studio, follower of the Lee Strasberg's method acting techniques from New York, techniques that were famous for teaching illustrious and talented actors such as Marlon Brando, Robert De Niro or Al Pacino. After all, this acting career was well paid, or at least better than any of his previous jobs. Besides, he really enjoyed himself and it seemed he had been bitten by the acting "bug", stating that "in acting, I found it was just me. It all depended on me and my own choices. I didn't have to answer to anyone about what I wanted to do." (Meikle 52) Soon, he was hired to be in the TV teen series, *21 Jump Street* (1987-1991), which addressed teens' school problems such as bullying, sexual abuse, pornography, teen drinking or drug abuse. With this TV show, not only did Depp acquire real acting experience and a sense of identity as an performer but also popularity and the label of teen icon or teen idol. At first, he was bemused by and uncomfortable with this whole situation. After a few years later, he began to feel himself trapped in this typecasting which he couldn't shake off. Unable to grow as an actor he often commented that he "was not feeling good about myself or this self-induced/out-of-control jail term (...) I was stuck, filling up space between commercials." (Salisbury foreword ix) Moreover, he described himself as "dumb-founded, lost, shoved down the gullets of America as a young republican. TV boy, heart-throb, teen idol, teen hunk. Plastered, posterized, postured, patented, painted, plastic!!!" (Salisbury foreword ix) It was also during this period of time that Depp was labelled a rebel, since he developed and

displayed a strong sense of social and political conscience as well as a measure of nonconformity and resistance to mainstream social positions.

This situation was soon to come to an end, when Johnny Depp met the young maverick film director Tim Burton in 1990. Their encounter brought both Depp and Burton into a close and long-lasting friendship and one of cinema's most satisfying creative working collaborations. Depp was introduced to Burton through his then girlfriend Winona Ryder, who had previously played in Tim Burton's film *Beetlejuice* (1988). She had already been cast as Kim in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), thus their first meeting was, in fact, an audition that ended with casting Johnny Depp in Burton's film. This meeting was later recorded as a very unusual one in which dozen cups of coffee were drunk and inarticulate speech prevailed using, thus, gestures instead of words or by finishing each other's sentences, a situation which has not seemed to improve even with their long-lasting fellowship. As a matter of fact, both artists admitted in interviews that they are not the most verbal of people. It seemed that they enjoyed this meeting so much that they became instantly best friends off screen. Of this encounter Depp has always had nice memories, often praising the director as a man who has a very special gift, "a true genius" who rescued him, "a loser, an outcast, just another piece of expendable Hollywood meat" (Salisbury foreword xii), from a disgruntled and monotonous professional career.

## **2. Common filmography and archetypal themes**

*Edward Scissorhands* (1990) was Tim Burton's most personal film, a creation the origin of which dates back to his teenage years' drawings: a man with long scissor blades for fingers who is unable to touch people. Edward, the main character, is the unfinished man created by an eccentric inventor, who dies before he can complete his job, which is to give Edward his hands. Alone and isolated in his hilltop gothic castle, Edward leads a sheltered life, when Peg, the Avon lady, knocks at his door to sell her beauty products. Touched by his loneliness, Peg takes him to her home in the suburbs. Shy, kind and awkward Edward then falls in love with Peg's daughter, Kim, and meets the townspeople in a pastel-colored version of suburbia. At first, Peg's neighbors seem to accept him as their own, making him the source of fantasy, gossip, adoration and lust. He wins them over

with his wildly kitsch topiaries, outlandish hairstyles and elaborate ice sculptures. But soon the townspeople turn into a violent mob that literally chases Edward away. This turn of events is caused by Jim's jealousy (Kim's boyfriend) and neighbor divorcee Joyce's spite.

It was decisively Depp's breakthrough film. He showed Edward (Fig.4) as a silent, innocent and endearing character and soon Depp was considered to be a skilled physical actor who could get across the subtle shifts in emotion that Edward experiences throughout the film. Depp portrayed Edward as someone that is frequently reduced to immobility. Each miscalculated gesture or movement can bring disastrous consequences. Thus, Depp rests much of his performance on a range of facial expressions and expressive big eyes that either convey innocence, fear, distress and loss or anger. Depp's extraordinary ability to convey his innermost thoughts through his eyes resembles the acting skill of silent actors. It is as rare talent and one which sets him apart from his peers.



Fig.4 Johnny Depp and Tim Burton first worked together in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990).

Edward was also Depp's first misfit or misunderstood outcast in a Burton film. The film is a modern fairy tale which becomes a metaphor for teenage vulnerability and inability to connect with the world and their feeling of isolation. It also conveys such themes as intolerance of others' disabilities or differences, innocence, a preadolescent, childlike attitude to life, the individual attitude to death (the inventor's death scene), alienation, family relationships (especially the father-figure and Peg's family), dogs as faithful companions (Edward alone patting a street dog when he fled Peg's house after a violent jealous conflict with Kim's boyfriend, Jim). It is also a criticism of American suburban towns. At first, the townspeople treat Edward with curiosity and awe and they eventually seem to accept his talents. However, they never forget his difference, his

scissors or his bizarre appearance and soon suspicion and fear dominate the neighborhood and these suburban folk become a dangerous and vindictive mob. Edward's terrible fate happens ironically during the Christmas holidays, a special season that usually conveys the idea of tolerance, love and acceptance.

In *Edward Scissorhands*, there are scissors, skeletons and spiders. These iconographic elements turned out to be some of Burton's visual trademarks and obsessions in later films. Other Burton obsessions are clowns (there is one on Kim's bed the first time Edward sleeps on it) and the image of winter's snow (caused by Edward's ice sculptures or in the Christmas scene at the beginning of the film). There are also clear references to Frankenstein's monster inspired by James Whale's film, *Frankenstein* (1931).

Burton and Depp's next collaboration, *Ed Wood* (1994), was a biopic based on the man acknowledged to be the worst director of all time, Edward D. Wood Jr., whose sole ambition was to be the next Orson Welles. Depp later said that "within 10 minutes of hearing about the project, I was committed"<sup>6</sup>. The film is also about Ed Wood's personal eccentricities and his working relationship with faded horror legend, Bela Lugosi, who had been a famous star for his role as Dracula in Universal films during the 1930s. Obviously, Burton shares with Ed Wood his passion for filmmaking. Moreover, he drew parallels between Ed Wood's suburban upbringing and his own - as well as Wood's friendship with Bela Lugosi and his own friendship with legendary one-time Dracula actor Vincent Price. As a matter of fact, Vincent Price, one of his idols, had also worked on two Burton's films: his first short animated film *Vincent* (1982) in which Price was the narrator of Vincent's misfortunes and *Edward Scissorhands*, Price's last film, as the creator of the main character.

Burton had already been acquainted with the filmmaker's films during his childhood, when he saw *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959) on television. Furthermore, the film's setting was also located in the airport and the cemetery of Burbank. So, it is unsurprising that Burton chose to direct such a film. At the time of the release of *Ed Wood*, director Michael Lehman stated: "it's amazing to me that Tim, with his sensibility, has been so successful in Hollywood, because he could just as easily have ended up like Ed Wood." (Woods 114) Both Burton and Wood can be seen as directors who believe

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<sup>6</sup> Arnold, Gary. "Depp sees promise in cult filmmaker Ed Wood's story". *Washington Times*, (October 2, 1994), online access: 20 Oct. 2011

passionately in their work. Clearly, Burton is more talented and luckier than Wood; still they stubbornly do whatever they want to in their film work, no matter what the consequences, never compromising their creative vision. For instance, Wood directs a band of veritable misfits who are willing to participate in all of Wood's crazy stunts, such as running from the police for filming on public streets without permits or getting baptized in order to secure funding for a movie from religious fringe groups.

The film again addresses some popular themes in Tim Burton's work: misfits or misunderstood, freakish and alienated characters who aren't accepted by the mainstream or 'normal' society (besides Wood and Bela Lugosi, TV hostess Vampyra or fake psychic mystic Criswell were faithful members in Wood's film ensemble, with whom Wood was usually associated); tolerance of people's different beliefs (Ed Wood loved to dress in women's clothes, especially, angora sweaters); the death concept as part of life (Lugosi's death scene is beautifully and tastefully handed).

The monster theme is also conveyed when Depp's character directs his cast in some scenes from Wood's films *The Bride of the Monster* or *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. Also the father-figure is implicit in Landau's Lugosi and his private moments with Depp's Wood. He is portrayed as a flawed but still a lovable father. Wood admires him and secretly wishes to imitate his old-time greatness and bask in his star status.

For Burton, Depp was the obvious choice as he could convey the gleeful optimistic and naïve personality of Ed Wood. Most reviewers were favorably impressed by Depp's performance. For instance, Kim Newman critically praised Depp for his "hyperactive monomania and peculiar high voice" (Smith & Matthews 177). For the first time in his acting career, Depp was nominated for Best Actor at the 1995 Golden Globes and received some prestigious awards such as the London Film Critics Circle Award for Actor of the Year in 1996<sup>7</sup>. Though well acclaimed by most reviewers, getting the best reviews of his career at the time, *Ed Wood* was Burton's first box office failure. The film's dark in tone and the strident representation of such character that is neither empathic nor heroic are largely responsible for this failure. Burton fails to explain Wood's over-the-top optimism and persistence of producing such kitsch films. Additionally, *Ed Wood* has such a bizarre register that it is not easy for mature mass audiences to take it up seriously or entertaining.

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<sup>7</sup> Most of the awards were, nevertheless, justly won by Martin Landau for his portrayal of Bela Lugosi as a poignant, complex man, including the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor in 1995.

In *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), the third film made by Depp and Burton, the director finally managed to create his first outright horror film, inspired by Mario Bava's *Black Sunday* (1960), as well as by Hammer horror films<sup>8</sup> and their gothic atmosphere of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was Depp's first big action blockbuster film success in a prominent role<sup>9</sup>. The film was loosely based upon "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by Washington Irving, which was published in 1819 and named as America's first native horror monster story or gothic folktale. It was also influenced by Disney's animated version *The Adventure of Ichabod and Mr. Crane* (1949), as Burton was "more familiar with the Disney cartoon than the actual story." (Smith & Matthews 222) At the time, both Burton and Depp had come from frustrating moments in their careers. Burton met controversial critical acclaim but relative box office failure in his previous film *Mars Attacks!* (1996). Moreover, in 1998, he failed to shoot *Superman Lives*<sup>10</sup> (a project he had been working on for more than a year) due to financial problems and the script constant changes. Depp was disillusioned with both his previous films' bad reviews and their commercial failures: Terry Gilliam's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), *The Astronaut's Wife* (1999) and his directorial debut *The Brave* (1997).

The story follows the journey of Ichabod Crane, an unorthodox rationalist New York police detective, who is sent to the upstate town of Sleepy Hollow to investigate the murders of several prominent local people. It seems the ghoulish murders are being committed by a supernatural spirit of a Hessian Horseman. At first, Ichabod is skeptical since he only believes things that are scientifically proved, or come from reason and deduction, and tries to find the real human murderer. After some more deaths (one of which Ichabod witnesses) and his own confrontation with the spirit of the Headless Horseman, Ichabod comes to believe that the spirit is indeed the murderer. He also finds out that the Headless Horseman is controlled by the human and very much alive Lady Van Tassel, the wife of one of the prominent townspeople. Meanwhile, Ichabod falls in love with the mysterious and beautiful Katrina, stepdaughter of the woman responsible for the murders, and confronts his most terrible hidden childhood's memories.

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Lee, who often played Count Dracula as the leading character in Hammer films, performed a cameo as the Burgomeister in *Sleepy Hollow*.

<sup>9</sup> Depp had been previously involved in John Badham's *Nick of Time* (1995) but this film was a flop at the box office.

<sup>10</sup> After a series of unsuccessful projects to resurrect Superman on the screen, Bryan Singer was hired to direct *Superman Returns* in 2006.



The film's tagline "Heads will roll" and the decapitated heads of the people who are murdered bring to memory blades and swords, a common iconographic element in Burton's early and later filmography. In fact, death is the main theme in this film. There are, at least, twelve decapitations and several other onscreen deaths, as well as various references to people's deaths off screen. Families and bloodlines also play a major part in *Sleepy Hollow*'s complex conspiracy plot. The father-figure is also present in this film when Ichabod dreams about his puritanical father torturing his mother to death for her witchcraft. Again the outsider figure is played by Depp as the witty, skittish, scientifically-minded Ichabod Crane. He and his ideas are not truly accepted by the society of Sleepy Hollow (on his arrival, townspeople lock their doors and close their windows), except for Katrina, his sweetheart. There are also two monsters in Sleepy Hollow: the Headless Horseman (the male monster) and Katrina's stepmother, Lady Van Tassel, (the female monster), a clear reference to Frankenstein's monster and his bride.

Some of Burton's popular iconographic visual and aesthetical elements are also present in the film, for instance, a dreamy, macabre, gothic atmosphere shown by the Sleepy Hollow Western wood and The Tree of the Dead, the dreadful killing ground which the Headless Horseman emerges from when he is summoned and where he stores the heads of his victims. Halloween icons such as pumpkins and skeletons are projected as shadows by a light lantern in an endearing family moment just before the whole Killian family is killed by the Headless Horseman (Fig.5). A scarecrow whirls whenever the monster brushes it and the Hessian Horseman finally regains his head which is, in fact, a skull.



Fig.5 The Headless Horseman in Burton's 1999 *Sleepy Hollow*.

*Sleepy Hollow* was considered by most reviewers to be a well-produced and entertaining blockbuster due to the combination of production design, cinematography, costume design and the perfect blend of studio and location work. Depp played a non-

standard action-movie hero. Ichabod is a good-natured hero who abhors blood or any sign of uncleanness. He is also given to fainting a lot whenever he sees something scary. According to Burton, Ichabod “hits like a girl and he throws like a girl and he acts – as far as I can tell – like a thirteen-year-old.” (Salisbury 177) Depp, in later interviews, claimed that he “always thought of Ichabod as a very delicate, fragile person who was maybe a little *too* in touch with his feminine side, like a frightened little girl” (Fraga 133). Overall, most reviewers praised Depp’s performance and claimed that *Sleepy Hollow* is “one celluloid’s instant classic” (Baddeley 137).

In 2005, Burton and Depp worked together in two films: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Corpse Bride*. Thanks to Depp’s success in the role as Jack Sparrow in the *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), Burton had no trouble in casting Depp as his first choice for the role of Willy Wonka. This film was an adaptation of Roald Dahl’s story *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. While still in pre-production, Burton’s film was often referred to by many critics as a remake of the colorful 1971 film version which had starred Gene Wilder as the flamboyant Willy Wonka. However, this was far from the truth. Burton’s work was, in fact, a carefully detailed adaptation of Dahl’s original novel.

The film tells the story of a very poor boy, Charlie Bucket, who lives with his loving family (parents and four grandparents) near a chocolate factory owned by Willy Wonka. Charlie, along with four spoiled children, wins a golden ticket allowing access to Willy Wonka’s mysterious chocolate factory. Wonka lives inside his factory alone with his factory workers, the rather small Oompa-Loompas. He is looking for a worthy successor to run his factory and, by a process of elimination, each of the badly-behaved children is removed from the competition. In the end, Charlie is the winner and replaces Wonka as his worthy successor.

The importance of family is definitely the main theme of the film. Charlie has a good relationship with his family, who bring him up with strong sensible values, whereas the other four children are spoiled because their upbringing lacks the most basic values such as understanding or tolerance. Charlie and Wonka are characters who need each other in their lives. Charlie needs Wonka’s money but it is Wonka who really needs Charlie the most. Wonka has all the chocolate in the world but he has no familial love. Wonka recalls his childhood in flashbacks. Again, the father-figure plays an important role in a Tim

Burton film. Wonka's father is a domineering dentist<sup>11</sup> who loathes candy. He abandons his son when he doesn't obey his orders and goes trick or treating during the Halloween season.

The chocolate factory's design aesthetic was inspired by the pop art psychedelic colors of the 1960s, as opposed to the dream-like visual atmosphere of the town and house where Charlie lives. Christmas snow and a narrator voice (previously used in *Edward Scissorhands*) are also some of the characteristic elements that Burton uses to convey the idea of a fairy-like tale.

Depp's Wonka is very different to that of Gene Wilder. His Wonka is an eccentric character, a lonely and almost lunatic, sinister man, who wears thick, bug-eyed sunglasses and purple gloves and carries a transparent cane filled with candy. Depp plays again a sad, scarred, quirky character, an outsider who has problems connecting with people (he seems to shrink from contact whenever he has to greet someone) because of his problematic past. According to Depp, Wonka "puts on his game face in front of the people, but underneath he has an anxiety about contact or closeness. I believe he is a germophobe, which is why he wears gloves, and in addition to the gloves it's as if he's wearing a mask." (Robb, 2007:195) Many reviewers have since stated that Depp's Wonka resemble Howard Hughes or Citizen Kane, an image Depp and Burton agreed that they wanted to convey. Both actor and director received well deserved praises for their work together and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* became a blockbuster phenomenon, surpassing even their first big box office success *Sleepy Hollow*.

Before returning as Jack Sparrow for the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* sequel, Johnny Depp found the time to make his fifth film with Burton: *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* (2005). This film was Burton's first full-length stop-motion film.<sup>12</sup> Depp provided the voice of Victor Van Dort, the puppet character, whose looks were clearly modeled on the actor's distinctive visage. Although most reviewers also saw Victor's visage as a grown up version of Vincent (the boy who fantasizes about being Vincent Price), most of the character's acting traits are Depp's in early films.

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<sup>11</sup> Wonka's father is played by Christopher Lee. Since *Sleepy Hollow*, the actor has become Burton's regular collaborator. He was also the voice of Pastor Gallswell in *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* (2005) and of beast Jabberwocky in *Alice in Wonderland* (2010). In *Dark Shadows* (2012), Christopher Lee performed a cameo as the fisherman Captain Silas Clarney.

<sup>12</sup> Burton had previously produced *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993).

Young and shy Victor Van Dort lives in a small 19<sup>th</sup> century European village and is due to marry the beautiful and sensible Victoria Everglot. It is an arranged marriage and the two have never met each other. Soon Victor has to say his vows in front of both families and the strict rather unpleasant Pastor Gallswell. Although Victor falls immediately in love with Victoria, he is unable to remember his vows during his wedding rehearsal. Unhappy, he flees from the rehearsal and arrives at a dark and cold forest. There, he succeeds in saying his marriage vows only to be married to a Corpse Bride who had been murdered on her wedding day a few years earlier. The Corpse Bride takes Victor to the land of the dead where Victor tries desperately to get out. Meanwhile, the Corpse Bride ends up discovering her murderer and eventually goes with Victor to the land of the living in order to help him prevent Victoria's marriage to another suitor who turns out to be the Corpse Bride's murderer. At the end, Victor is free to marry his beloved Victoria.

Many of the themes conveyed in *Corpse Bride* are again the obsessions of earlier Burton's films: shy, innocent, misperceived, misfit characters; family relationships; a childlike attitude to life, an individualistic preoccupation with death. For Burton, old-fashioned stop-motion animation was also the ideal medium for his new gothic tale in which he portrayed a dark misty 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian atmosphere full of Burtonesque icons such as skulls, skeletons, bones, tombstones, dark night and winter's snow. The film was critically acclaimed for not being "the macabre horror story as the title suggested, but a visually lovely tale of love lost."<sup>13</sup>

Burton and Depp would team up again for *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), a dark and gothic tale. Their joint venture on this occasion was a screen adaptation of the highly acclaimed Broadway musical *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979) produced by composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim, who was also responsible for the musical score of the film. Depp was cast in the leading role of the Demon Barber.<sup>14</sup> Having ducked the musical elements of the earlier *Willy Wonka* film, with *Sweeney Todd* Burton was now prepared to embrace them.

It tells the story of a barber, Benjamin Barker, who is falsely accused of robbery by Judge Turpin. The wicked judge lusts after the barber's wife so he unjustly imprisons and

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<sup>13</sup> Ebert, Roger. "Tim Burton's Corpse Bride". *Chicago Sun Times*. (September 23, 2005) online access: 20 Dec. 2011

<sup>14</sup> The origins of Sweeney Todd, the demon barber, remote from the 1760s. But it has been a popular and sensational story since the Victorian era, when numerous of newspapers' publications and stage plays appeared, thus, becoming a folk character of the English gothic tales.

condemns Barker to deportation to a distant British colony. Due to the judge's envy, a family is destroyed. Full of grief, the barber's wife supposedly kills herself and their baby girl, Johanna, ends up being up brought by Judge Turpin himself, thus becoming his ward. Some years later, the barber arrives *incognito* in London and swears revenge against those who destroyed his family and his happiness. Under a new name, Sweeney Todd, he then meets Mrs. Lovett, a meat pie shop owner, who rents him an upstairs room so that Todd can establish a respectable barber shop there. Mrs. Lovett also explains what eventually happened to his wife and daughter. Deranged by what he learns, Sweeney Todd begins a series of murders by slitting his wealthy customers' throats with his razor blades. The bodies are then disposed of by Mrs. Lovett who bakes Todd's victims in delicious and much sought-after meat pies. After several graphic, brutal and horrific deaths (including Judge Turpin's and Mrs. Lovett's killings), Todd ends up inadvertently slicing through the throat of his wife whom he had thought long dead. The film ends with Todd being dispatched with his own razor by the hand of his young assistant, Tobias, life draining out of him in a spreading blood pool beneath the inert body of his beloved wife.

Again the main theme of the film is death, a popular one in Tim Burton's filmography. But there are others. The main characters' family problems can be seen displaced onto the strained and strange relationship of Judge Turpin and his ward Johanna; in addition, Mrs. Lovett and Sweeney Todd sometimes look and behave like a married couple. The father-figure is clearly identifiable in the film's beginning by the companionable relationship between Sweeney Todd and the young sailor, Anthony. Burton also introduced the mother-figure, as shown by Mrs. Lovett's relationship with Tobias, the young barber's assistant.

Burton's quirky dark humor was once more exposed during the film's promotional interviews by clarifying how he perceived the filmmaking of his film, "it's like doing the *Sound of Music* but with lots of blood..." (Robb 213). By comparing his *Sweeney Todd* film with a highly acclaimed musical film from the 1960s, popularized as a Christmas holiday season classic, Burton seems to suggest that his film is also about family relationships but with a darker and more violent atmosphere. He also seems to suggest that his film's character is also a victim of the society he lives in. Other common element is that they are both Musicals which had previously been original highly acclaimed Broadway productions.

The gothic gore-heavy atmospheres in *Sweeney Todd* are greatly inspired by the predominant iconographic elements of the expressionist and surrealist styles, as well as by Hammer Horror films of the 1960s. The razors (Fig.6), Todd's only "faithful friends", convey the idea of slicing or cutting, a close resemblance to the late 1970s stalk and slash or splatter movies. In a shaving contest with Barber Pirelli, Sweeney Todd reveals the same facial expression, the same concentration while shaving as Edward Scissorhands while cutting hair. In fact, Todd's razors become more than his friends as he says "at last, my arm is complete again", a clear reference to Edward whose hands are entirely formed of scissors.



Fig.6 Sweeney Todd's faithful friends – the razors.

For his character, Depp took singing lessons to show off his vocal abilities and changed once again some of his physical features: Todd's eyes are always rimmed in black, he has a white powder visage and jet black hair combed with a shock of white resembling an older Edward Scissorhands. In order to emphasize his weird and demoniac appearance, Sweeney Todd always carries his cut-throat razors around (a remembrance of Edward's scissors in *Edward Scissorhands*). Depp's performance was superbly done. Not only did he show a macabre and bitter character, but also he sang really well, a fact which surprised many reviewers. His acting as well as his singing performance received positive critical reception and award nominations, including his third nomination for the Academy Award for Best Actor in 2008. Depp also won several best performance awards such as his first Golden Globe Award for Best Actor – Motion Picture Musical or Comedy. Indeed, the

critical acclaim for *Sweeney Todd* was unanimous.<sup>15</sup> Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun Times* wrote:

“The bloodiest musical in stage history, it now becomes the bloodiest in film history, and it isn’t a jolly romp, either (...) It combines some of Tim Burton’s favourite elements: the fantastic, the ghoulish, the bizarre, the unspeakable, the romantic and, in Johnny Depp, he has an actor he has worked with since *Edward Scissorhands* and finds a perfect instrument.”(Meikle 428)

Depp’s Mad Hatter in *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) was his seventh role in a Burton movie. *Alice in Wonderland* is a free screen adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s fantasy stories *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1895) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). After so many leading roles, it was the first time that Depp played a supporting character. Burton chose his first female character for the leading role instead. Nevertheless, it is Depp’s Mad Hatter that is mostly remembered. In fact, the Mad Hatter role in Burton’s film is hugely expanded and arguably over-dominant in comparison with the literary source.

Alice is a young nineteen-year-old girl who learns she is soon to be married to a pompous Victorian young man. She is attending her own engagement party. Unable to decide whether she should accept or not her suitor’s proposal, Alice flees and chases a strange white rabbit. She tumbles down into a rabbit-hole where she discovers a new fantastic world in which she meets the weirdest characters ever, including the Mad Hatter, the big foreheaded Red Queen, the White Queen and the twins Tweedledee and Tweedleedum. According to a long-standing prophecy, Alice has to slay the beast Jabberwocky with the Vorpal Sword in order to stop the Red Queen’s totalitarian regime, under which all these characters live, and return Wonderland to its rightful monarch, the White Queen. She successfully slays the Jabberwocky and becomes the Mad Hatter’s closest friend. Then she comes back to her own world where she decides not to accept her marriage proposal and to become an entrepreneur instead so she can travel around the world in search of new adventures.

*Alice in Wonderland* is full of strange, misfit and even lunatic characters, who don’t seem to be well accepted by the society they live in. The Mad Hatter is also no exception;

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<sup>15</sup> Although the critics were impressed by Burton’s film, the public was less so. *Sweeney Todd*’s revenues were far less than Depp’s third sequel of the *Pirates of the Caribbean: at the World’s End* (the franchise film which produced the least box receipts so far).

he is just the latest in Depp's long line of eccentric characters. Dressed all in silk and velvet, Depp's Hatter has red lips set in a face of deathly pallor and vibrant big red eyes and hair poisoned by the milliminers' mercury. The Hatter is a sinister character who had been cast out from the castle by the Red Queen and has occasional psychotic episodes whenever he is really scared or furious at unjustified situations. Depp delivered a clever and compelling performance, especially considering that he had to act and even dance almost exclusively in front of ubiquitous CGI 'green' screens.

The tagline "Off with her (Alice's) Head" is the most used speech line in the film delivered by the big foreheaded Red Queen. Just like in *Sweeney Todd* and *Sleepy Hollow*, heads are usually cut off or threatened to be cut off. Some of the most popular of Burton's iconographic elements are also present in the film: scissors (Mad Hatter's) and swords (Alice needs one to slay the beast). The aesthetic designs Burton applied in his film are very similar to the ones used in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Despite his opposition to them in previous films, Burton finally surrenders to CGI effects and delivers a powerful, colorful psychedelic and dreamy setting. The film was released in 3D and has been a big box office success ever since. *Alice in Wonderland* became the second highest-grossing film of 2010 and Depp was voted the top money making star of the year.

Burton's latest collaboration with Johnny Depp is the film *Dark Shadows*<sup>16</sup> which was released in May 2012. Depp plays once again an eccentric character, a tortured and cursed 200-year-old vampire, Barnabas Collins. This gothic film was based on the 1966-1971 American soap opera, *Dark Shadows*, a TV cult classic. Among its many fans were Tim Burton and Johnny Depp, who had worked on the planning of the production of the film for several years. In interviews, Depp confessed that when he was a boy, he "was completely and utterly obsessed with a television show called *Dark Shadows*. I wanted to be Barnabas Collins, and I wanted the cane with the wolf's head on it." (Meikle 250) Unsurprisingly, Depp bought the rights to the show through his own production company Infinitum Nihil and asked Burton to direct it. For Burton, the reason behind their commitment to this film had to do with both the director and actor's shared enthusiasm for weird, obscure things.

Barnabas Collins is a rich and powerful eighteenth century man who lives in Collinwood Manor in Collinsport, Maine. Angelique is a witch whose heart has been

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<sup>16</sup> Both Burton and Depp are co-producers of the film.



broken by Barnabas' carelessness flamboyant behavior. Offended by his refusal to love her, she curses him by turning him into a vampire and then burying him alive. Two centuries later, Barnabas is inadvertently freed from his tomb, thus emerging into the very changed world of 1972. He returns to his manor only to find it almost ruined and dilapidated. He also has to deal with his dysfunctional peculiar family, whose members harbor their own dark secrets. The film then chronicles the events following Barnabas' return from the grave.

For his role as Barnabas Collins, Johnny Depp covered his face with heavy white-powdered make-up in order to look like more a ghostly pale vampire. His polished and very long vampire nails were clearly inspired by Max Schreck's nails in F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). According to Burton, "there's that whole theory of 'mask-acting' – if you're hiding behind a bit of make-up it allows something else to come out of you – and I find that fascinating."<sup>17</sup> Once again, Burton seems very confident about Depp's performance, thus, praising the actor by comparing his acting style to that of the 1920s and 1930s horror movie actor, Lon Chaney.

Many of the recurrent iconographic gothic elements in Burton's work are once again displayed in *Dark Shadows*. Scarecrows, pumpkins, skeletons and spiders abound in Collinwood Manor, which is located on top of a hill and is surrounded by a gothic ethereal forest that closely resembles the Western wood of *Sleepy Hollow*.

Dysfunctional families are also a recurrent Burtonesque theme. From the Boggs family who take in the naïve and reclusive Edward in *Edward Scissorhands* to Edward Bloom's family in *Big Fish* (2003), Burton has always dealt with the unique oddness within each household. Burton has recently claimed in *Empire* magazine that "every family is strange, if you scratch the surface. Even the ones that seem really normal. Often *especially* the ones that seem really normal."<sup>18</sup> The absent and flawed father-figure is also portrayed in this film. Whereas the werewolf teenage girl Carolyn doesn't know her father's whereabouts and is deprived of a close relationship with her father, her eight-year-old cousin David lives with an indifferent and utterly selfish father, Roger Collins, who abandons him in pursuit of his own pleasures. In *Dark Shadows*, there are several onscreen deaths (Barnabas' victims) and references to other family members' deaths off screen,

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<sup>17</sup> Jordan, Richard. "Dark Shadows-Blood Lines", *Total Film*, (May 2012), issue 192, p.88

<sup>18</sup> "Dark Shadows", *Empire*, May, 2012, issue 275, p.110.

those of people who later turned into ghostly spirits such as David's mother or Josette, Barnabas' sweetheart.

Burton's films convey values such as understanding and tolerance, respect for and freedom to follow one's dreams, as is testified in films such as *Ed Wood* or *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. All the while, his film themes convey universal feelings such as the uncomfortable and constant feeling of not belonging anywhere or being misunderstood and the duality of one's inner self, as opposed to what the world perceives you to be, or the duality between the weird and the normal.

Sometimes the concept of duality in Burton's filmography is emphasized by the idealistic, innocent, childlike behaviour of his main characters as opposed to the pessimistic, duplicitous, villainous behaviour of others. For instance, Edward's innocence is opposed to Jim's villainy; Charlie is opposed to the spoiled and mischievous children in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*; Crane is opposed to the Lady Van Tassel and the Headless Horseman in *Sleepy Hollow*; young barber Benjamin Barker or the young sailor, Anthony versus Judge Turpin's lustfulness and envy in *Sweeney Todd*. In essence, this duality can also be explained as a metaphor for childhood as an opposition to adulthood.

*Edward Scissorhands* introduced a gallery of misfits or misunderstood outcasts as the quirky main characters so predominant in all Tim Burton's filmography. These characters are imperfect, flawed heroes. Johnny Depp once admitted during a *Sleepy Hollow* conference interview, "The characters that I've played in Tim's films are all... kind of deeply damaged. Which I think of as a good thing. The damaged individual dealing with the world. That's probably, at his very root, why Tim does what he does, and why I do what I do." (Smith & Matthews 241). Most of Burton's characters usually live inside their own heads. On the *Sleepy Hollow* DVD commentary Tim Burton stated, for instance, that "Ichabod lives inside his head opposed to a man with no head." (Burton, *Sleepy Hollow* DVD, 2000) Like Ichabod Crane, Edward Scissorhands, Wonka, Sweeney Todd, all seem to show their own conflicted emotions through their eyes and slight, discreet gestures or facial expressions. Some of these characters even use heavy make-up as a mask to cover all their inner secrets or suffering from the surrounding world.

Social criticism, especially against the ruling establishment in suburban towns, is also a common theme in Burton's films, such as in *Edward Scissorhands*, *Ed Wood*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Suburban ways of living are critically

depicted by Burton as a façade. The concept of normality is just an act and appearances are deceptive; underneath it all, there are secrets, murders, fetishes and abnormal feelings. In *Edward Scissorhands*, one of the characters, Joyce, one of the pillars of so-called normal society, is portrayed as a man-eater as she sexually harasses the man who is trying to repair her washing-machine or Edward at her new beauty salon. In *Ed Wood*, Wood and his film crew are judged as “freaks” by Dolores Fuller, Wood’s girlfriend, and clearly ostracized by the studio owners, the public audience and the Hollywood society who seem to laugh at their attempts to realize their dreams of fame and fortune. In *Sleepy Hollow*, there is a ringing criticism of the town’s community leaders as they are supposed to be friendly and kind but they are, in fact, involved in a conspiracy plot that leads to several murders. In *Sweeney Todd*, the justice system is clearly under critical surveillance. Innocents (like Sweeney Todd) are sent to deportation or jail because of the judge’s envy or jealousy. At the beginning of this film, an innocent boy is unjustly condemned to be hanged for the theft of a small piece of bread.

Love triangles are also very common in Burton’s filmography. For instance, in *Edward Scissorhands*, Edward, Kim and the jock Jim are a love triangle; *Ed Wood*, Wood, Lugosi and Kathy (the future Mrs. Wood); in *Sleepy Hollow*, Ichabod, Katrina and Brom Van Brunt; in *Tim Burton’s Corpse Bride*, Victor, Victoria and the corpse bride, Emily; in *Sweeney Todd*, Benjamin Barker, his wife and Judge Turpin or the young sailor, Anthony, Judge Turpin and his surrogate daughter, Johanna or Mrs. Lovett, Sweeney Todd and his scissors; in *Dark Shadows*, Barnabas Collins, the witch Angelique and Barnabas’ beloved Josette (or her descendant, Victoria).

The patriarch is also a predominant archetype in Burton’s feature films. He is portrayed as a flawed father who is often shown on film in flashbacks (*Edward Scissorhands*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*), dreams (*Sleepy Hollow*) or hallucinations. In addition, the death of the father figure is often an important part of the film’s narrative, since it enables the audience to fully understand the main character’s behaviour and his motivations. For instance, in *Edward* and *Charlie*, although Edward and Wonka’s fathers are peripheral characters, they are pertinent to the main story, and seem only to exist in the character’s minds. They are the reason why their children are who they are. Edward is an innocent character who had never met other people before so, he doesn’t know society’s rules and their mischievousness and Wonka is afraid of germs (that’s the

reason why he wears white gloves) and loves chocolates and candies because his father, a dentist, hates them and preaches on the evils of candy for our teeth. His disapproval of Wonka's affection for candy leads to their estrangement. In *Sleepy Hollow*, Ichabod Crane is a rational but a reserved and withdrawn man due to his childhood trauma, since his father has killed his mother.

When the flawed father figure is alive and present in the leading character's life, like Bela Lugosi in *Ed Wood* or Edward Bloom Jr. in *Big Fish* (2003), they are greatly admired but often misunderstood by their (presumptive) sons. Nevertheless, they are positive role models and sources of love and respect.

Burton's love for his dogs is also addressed in his filmography as they are frequently cast as faithful companions or even as main characters. In *Ed Wood*, Lugosi had two faithful Chihuahuas; in *Vincent* (1982) and *Frankenweenie* (1984), Burton's first short-length motion pictures, both the films' characters have dogs who they love completely; Pee-Wee Herman in *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* (1985); President James Dale in *Mars Attacks!* (1997); Violet in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* and Victor in *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* have dogs or zombie-skeleton dogs. In a recent interview for his animated film *Frankenweenie* (2012), Burton explained his strong connection with this pet, "It's such an unconditional relationship. I certainly had that experience with a first pet. It's so pure and memorable."<sup>19</sup> Dogs are the only pets in a Burton film. Therefore, dogs have always played an important role in Tim Burton's life. So, it seems that, while he was growing up, dogs were his connection to normalcy and thus, to the world. In a Burton film, the dog is associated with the most truthful, loyal and purest feelings of childhood and innocence. With a dog you can trust your darkest secrets or play your wildest imaginary games such as doing scientific experiments. The Burtonian dog is also a device for conveying the image of the monster-like creature to which was given life by an inventive creator. For instance, both young boys Vincent Malloy in *Vincent* and Victor Frankenstein in *Frankenweenie* (Fig.7) do Frankenstein-like electrical experiments on their dogs. Whereas in Vincent's case, he hopes these experiments will turn his dog into a horrible zombie, Victor successfully reanimates it during a lightning storm after his death by car accident. The Martians in *Mars Attacks* disintegrate dogs and do some experiments with them, as well as with humans, by having the head of Sarah

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<sup>19</sup> "2012 Preview – Frankenweenie", *Total Film*, February, 2012, issue 189, p.99.

Jessica Parker's character cut off and then placed on the tiny body of her lapdog. *Beetlejuice* (1988) is the only Burton film where a dog can be to blame for the subsequent events of the film's story. The dog is the cause of the Maitlands' fatal car crash and, eventually, the cause of their troubles as ghosts.



Fig.7 Sparky, the dog in *Frankenweenie* (1984).  
An homage to James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931).

Starting with *Beetlejuice* (1988) and later refined in *Edward Scissorhands*, Burton created his own personal style, the often so-called *Burtonesque* touch. This term often explains most of the recurrent trademarks in Burton's works: consistent striking visual aesthetics and imaginative alternative universes that incorporate the gothic, Pop Surrealism and German Expressionism; the gulf between childhood and adulthood and a presence of comedy amid the macabre.

It's clear that most of the themes, iconography and even obsessions portrayed in Burton's work are the result of his own childhood interests and experiences. The director brings his own love for gothic horror movies, as well as his own feelings, fears and difficulties of integration while growing up, into his films. Burton puts an emphasis on these childhood interests and experiences in his films because these experiences really shaped the way he sees the world and, consequently, shaped his life as adult.

## Chapter II - Johnny Depp

### 1. A chameleonic actor

Actors are people who are able to impersonate or embody the personality and character of other people sometimes better than their own. There are two types of actors: the technical, stage-trained or “classical” actor and the “method” or intuitive actor. This last category rose to prominence in the 1950s when actors began to enroll in the Lee Strasberg Institute in New York and, thus, started to use the method acting techniques pioneered by Constantin Stanislavski and advocated by Lee Strasberg and others. Method acting techniques were used by actors to create in themselves the thoughts and emotions of their characters, so as to develop lifelike performances. Method actors are often characterized as immersing themselves in their characters to the extent that they continue to portray them even offstage or off-camera for the duration of a project.

Johnny Depp clearly falls into the last category. By Depp’s own account, he likes to stay in tune with the characters he has played for long periods of time, during and even after the film’s shooting is over. For instance, in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), he was strapped into a straight black leather and rubber costume and used Edward’s long scissors for several hours in a row even when he wasn’t shooting. About this experience, Depp explained that “normal things like working the remote control on the television set were just impossible (...) I went to sleep with the hands on. I nicked myself a few times.” (Smith & Matthews 105). Another example is his Ed Wood character in 1994. After the shooting of the film, Depp kept the wide ventriloquist smile of Ed Wood for several months. After playing Jack Sparrow in the *Pirates of the Caribbean: the Curse of the Black Pearl* in 2003, Depp more than once reported that he decided to maintain Jack’s six golden teeth for months because this special physical feature gave him a roguish look. According to Depp, “you put so much of them into your system, it’s like there’s residue when you’re done.” (Meikle 227)

Though he still looks deceptively youthful, Depp has been an actor for almost thirty years. So, his acting career is a long one and it can be roughly divided into three major periods of time. First, at the beginning of his career, he was cast in teen roles from Glenn in his film debut in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) up until the late 1980s when he

portrayed Lieutenant Hanson in the TV teen series *21 Jump Street* (1987-1991). Due to his youthfulness and good looks, he was viewed by the audience and reviewers as the new “James Dean”, thus becoming a teen idol who featured on the covers of teen magazines. Accordingly, he was not taken seriously as an actor. Nevertheless, it was an important period of time, as Depp learned his craft.

Secondly, from 1990 to 2002, he has been mostly recognized for playing a string of impressively quirky or underdog roles such as Edward in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), Sam in *Benny & Joon* (1993), Ed D. Wood, Jr. in *Ed Wood* (1994), William Blake in *Dead Man* (1995), Raoul Duke in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998) and Ichabod Crane in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999). During this period of time, Depp turned down the roles that only emphasized his good looks. He even refused some roles which could guarantee him star status within the Hollywood system. For instance, Depp turned down commercial films and the roles of Jonathan Harker in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1993), the Vampire Louis in Neil Jordan’s *Interview with a Vampire* (1994) or the cop Jack Traven in Jan de Bont’s *Speed* (1994). Instead, he chose risk-taking roles in small independent and artistic films in which he could transform himself from a teen idol into a character actor, thus refining his acting skills. Consequently, he was critically acclaimed for his portrayal of unconventional characters while building up a reputation as a serious character actor. However, by the end of 1990s, Depp’s cinematic career was becoming polarized, from self-consciously artistic films such as *Dead Man* (1995) or *The Brave* (1997) to the conspicuously commercial genre films like *Nick of Time* (1995) and *Donnie Brasco* (1997).

Finally, from 2003 onward, just after becoming a father, Depp began to alternate small independent films such as *The Libertine* (2004), *Finding Neverland* (2004) and *The Rum Diary* (2011) with family-oriented big blockbuster films such as *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series (2003-11). In this way, he has been able to follow Marlon Brando’s useful advice to get well paid parts and in between making films that he really loves. He has also been able to perform alternatively bizarre character roles such as Willy Wonka in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) or Tony in *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (2009) and star status roles like John Dillinger in *Public Enemies* (2009) or Alexander Pearce in *The Tourist* (2010). This last decade has been a period of establishing himself as a cinematic icon.

Though he fell into films through a simple twist of fate and teen idol good looks, Depp is regarded by his peers “as the face of a thousand personalities”. (Meikle 302) He is also called a chameleonic actor by many reviewers. This seems to be intentional as Depp once claimed that “I’ve been lucky in the sense that I haven’t been typecast. It’s important to keep changing.” (Robb 75) This obsession with not being typecast, especially as a “franchise boy” (Salisbury introduction ix), has driven him to choose films in which he has been able to reveal a different personality: the naïve Edward in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), the disillusioned Native-American drifter Raphael in *The Brave* (1997), the psychedelic acid-driven Raoul Duke in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), the cynical demonology expert Dean Corso in *The Ninth Gate* (1999), the rationalist Ichabod Crane in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), the enigmatic, alien-possessed husband in *The Astronaut’s Wife* (1999), the opium and absinth addict as well as psychic detective Frederick Abberline in *From Hell* (2001), the adventurous and mischievous Jack Sparrow in *Pirates* and its sequels, or the bank robber and cop killer John Dillinger in *Public Enemies* (2009). Actually, Johnny Depp frequently chooses miscellaneous roles in contrasting genres just a few months apart. In 1995, he played, for instance, three contrasting roles: the average middle-class dad Gene Watson in the thriller *Nick of Time*, the meek outsider accountant William Blake in the drama western film *Dead Man* as well as the romantic lover in the romantic comedy *Don Juan DeMarco*. Or again, in 2004, he portrayed the praiseworthy roles of the imaginative and fantasy-driven author J.M Barrie in *Finding Neverland*, the paranoid and reclusive blocked writer Mort Rainey in *Secret Window* and the poet and notorious rake John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, in *The Libertine*. Depp the man is as far removed as possible from most of the characters he has portrayed onscreen, but his chameleon-like ability to become many men is what distinguishes him from many of his peers.

If there is any identifiable idiosyncrasy we can ascribe to Johnny Depp, it is his readiness to play less than his star status requires. In the real world, Depp is a modest, simple man who refuses to parade himself as a prodigiously talented actor or star. In France, he lives a quite ordinary private life with his family, detaching himself from the glamorous but superficial world of Hollywood.

Though his choice of roles is adventurous and eclectic, there’s an underlying constancy to them. His roles portray a certain typology of characters: the outsider, loner,



misfit or bizarre character. Whether they are childlike or mature adult characters, they are still misfits or quirky characters who can either be inspired by real-life people or be based on literary and cinematic works. Gene Watson in *Nick of Time* (1995) is perhaps the only exception as Depp portrayed an average father who is neither a loner, misfit nor bizarre. Whenever the topic is raised by interviewers about his choice of idiosyncratic roles, Johnny Depp often admits that he is “attracted to these off-beat roles because my life has been a bit abnormal.” (Robb 70) Furthermore, Depp once acknowledged that he “feels somehow much more comfortable playing it [idiosyncratic role]. I relate more easily than I do when I run across straight roles.” (Robb 63) From then on, Depp has been perceived as dark and weird by many reviewers and Hollywood studios.

*Edward Scissorhands* was the first film to connect Depp with bizarre and naïve characters in 1990. Since then, he has played several idealistic, innocent or childlike characters who have acted much like Edward, including in his next right-after-Edward movies *Benny & Joon* (1993), *Arizona Dream* (1993) and *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape?* (1993). The critics would later call these films Depp’s “small-town trilogy” period due to the fact that these eccentric childlike characters played by the actor were from the boondocks. In *Benny and Joon*, a romantic comedy, Depp is Sam<sup>20</sup>, an emotionally disturbed naïve young man who is illiterate and almost mute throughout the film. He loves Buster Keaton’s movies and Joon, who suffers from schizophrenia. In a film sequence, Sam does tricks with his hat resembling Buster Keaton’s film tricks. In *Arizona Dream*, Depp played dreamy and innocent Axel Blackmar, who leaves New York to go to his uncle’s wedding in Arizona. His uncle then persuades him to stay permanently in Arizona and take over the family business of selling cars. Axel is a confused young man who doesn’t know what to do with his life, thus feeling insecure about his future. The film is also about Axel’s awareness of the need for a dream-life to compensate for his mundane day-to-day existence. Meanwhile, in *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape*, Depp played the title’s main character, Gilbert, a quiet, passive and submissive young man, who lives in the small town of Endora. He feels repressed by his close-knit but dysfunctional family, which includes two sisters, a mentally challenged younger brother<sup>21</sup> and a morbidly obese mother.

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<sup>20</sup> For his performance as Sam, Depp was nominated a second time for a Golden Globe.

<sup>21</sup> Gilbert’s mentally challenged brother was played by the young Leonardo DiCaprio. For this role, the actor was critically acclaimed and received several award nominations, including the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor in 1994.

As the family faces financial problems and Gilbert is the oldest child, he has to support his family and take care of his younger brother. As a result, he is unable to get away from his family obligations and narrow small-town horizons and consequently be free to search for a better future life.

In order to portray Edward and Sam, Depp was inspired by the work of silent film actors like Charles Chaplin or Buster Keaton. His fascination for these screen comedians, who could communicate without words, led Depp to develop Edward's walk and facial expressions from Chaplin's Little Tramp character. Indeed, many reviewers described Edward as a blend of Chaplin's Little Tramp and Max Shreck's Nosferatu in just one character.

Like in Edward or Sam, Depp has often drawn inspiration to portray his characters from real life people, famous cartoons or other eclectic pop culture icons. In *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), Ichabod Crane was simultaneously inspired by the performances of Angela Lansbury in *Death on the Nile* (1978) and Basil Rathbone in the 1939 Sherlock Holmes film series. Ed Wood Jr., in *Ed Wood* (1994) was mainly inspired by a combination of American radio performer Casey Kasem, President Ronald Reagan, the Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and Charlie McCarthy, the famous dummy of vaudevillian ventriloquist, Edgar Bergen. Depp compared 18<sup>th</sup> century pirates to modern rock stars, therefore, he decided to portray the over-the-top pirate Jack Sparrow based on Keith Richards (the lead guitarist of The Rolling Stones) and Pepe Le Pew (the skunk cartoon character in Warner Brothers *Looney Tunes*) in *The Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003). At first, Disney producers didn't like Depp's performance saying during a casting interview, "What's wrong with him? Is he, you know, like some kind of weird simpleton? Is he drunk? By the way, is he gay?" In return, Depp reportedly stated, "But didn't you know that all my characters are gay?"<sup>22</sup> As a result, Disney producers eventually trusted Depp to portray both an enigmatic and mesmerizing character. Sparrow (Fig.8) is portrayed as a misfit and cynical character with a gangly walk, feminized gestures and sometimes an almost slurred speech. According to Sparrow's crew member Gibbs, the explanation for this behavior has to do with being left marooned on a desert island for too long with a lot of rum. He is a social misfit inasmuch as he doesn't fit in

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<sup>22</sup>Shoard, Catherine. "Disney Head thought Jack Sparrow ruined Pirates of the Caribbean". *The Guardian*, (November 30, 2010) Online access: 10 Jan.2012

Georgian society ruled by an absolute monarchic government. But he doesn't seem to fit in with his ship's crew members either. Indeed, he is often double-crossed by Captain Barbarossa and his crew. Jack can be treacherous and he survives mostly by wit and negotiation rather than weapons. He prefers to flee the most dangerous situations and fight only when it is absolutely necessary. His main ambitions are to get his ship back and to be famous at any cost. In the film, for instance, British Royal Navy officer James Norrington says, "You are, without doubt, the worst pirate I've heard of." Jack then replies, "Yes, but you have heard of me."<sup>23</sup>



Fig.8 Johnny Depp as Jack Sparrow in *The Pirates of the Caribbean* film series (2003-11).

Jack Sparrow is perhaps Depp's most popular and most critically acclaimed character to date, receiving several awards and nominations for his performance in *The Pirates of the Caribbean: the Curse of the Black Pearl*, including an Academy Award Nomination for Best Actor in 2004.

Another of Depp's most highly acclaimed performances<sup>24</sup> by film critics is his portrayal of the author J. M. Barrie in *Finding Neverland* (2004), the creator of the Peter Pan books. This semi-biographical film, and romanticized version of little-known events, follows J.M. Barrie's relationship with the widow Sylvia Llewellyn Davies and his close friendship with her four sons. (Fig.9) J.M. Barrie develops such a strong friendship with the Llewellyn children that they eventually become Barrie's inspiration for a new play: *Peter Pan*. *Peter Pan* is a successful play about a boy who refuses to grow up and has several magical adventures in a fairy land called Neverland.

In *Finding Neverland*, one of the Llewellyn Davies boys, Peter, was asked during the play's premiere if he was the boy who inspired the play "Peter Pan". The boy, played

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<sup>23</sup> From the film *The Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003)

<sup>24</sup> Depp was nominated for several awards including the Academy Award for Best Actor, BAFTA Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role and a third Golden Globe Award for Best Actor – Motion Picture Drama in 2005.

by the young actor Charlie Highmore, then points out that J.M. Barrie “*is the real Peter Pan*”. While Barrie’s most famous works are about children, Depp, for instance, has often played childlike roles before and after portraying the author of *Peter Pan*. Marc Forster, the director of the film *Finding Neverland*, confirmed that Depp “ultimately represents the man who never wants to grow up because he has a child within him which is still alive and you can see him in his choice of movies he makes.”(Forster, *Finding Neverland* DVD, 2005) On the *Finding Neverland* DVD commentary Kate Winslet, who played Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, also subscribed to the director’s viewpoint by stating that “working with Johnny Depp is like working with a fifth child. I have four children in the movie and then I have Johnny.” (Forster, *Finding Neverland* DVD, 2005).



Fig. 9 In *Finding Neverland* (2004) Johnny Depp stars as J. M. Barrie and Kate Winslet as Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, the widow whose sons inspired "Peter Pan."

Playing man-child roles seems to be one of Depp’s obsessions since many of his characters originate in either children’s books and TV series or theme park rides in films like *Finding Neverland* (2004), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), *Rango* (2011), *Lone Ranger* (2013) and *The Pirates* film series. Indeed, he is mostly famous by theatre audiences for this type of characters. I would argue that Depp is attached to childlike characters due to the fact that he was brought up in the USA, a country whose culture is wider ambivalent about growing up.

By contrast, Depp has also chosen adult roles that emphasized a more mature behavior of his characters, mostly in biopic films like *Public Enemies* (2009) or in independent and low budget films such as *Dead Man* (1995). Depp’s biopic characters are both young and adults impersonations. Although many of his adult roles are not so popular

among theatre audiences in comparison with his childlike characters' roles, they were highly praised by reviewers.

As far as real-life characters are concerned, Depp has portrayed ten real and living people in films to date, including Joe D. Pistone/ Donnie Brasco in *Donnie Brasco* (1997), George Jung in *Blow* (2001), John Dillinger in *Public Enemies* (2009) or Hunter S. Thompson's alias Raoul Duke in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998) and Paul Kemp in *The Rum Diary* (2011). By Depp's own account, he has always felt a great responsibility when it comes to portraying real and living people in films. Therefore, he has tried to play them as convincingly as possible.

In 1997, Johnny Depp played the undercover FBI agent Joe D. Pistone in Mike Newell's fact-based film *Donnie Brasco*, opposite Al Pacino. Joe D. Pistone infiltrated the New York mob as Donnie Brasco for six years in the 1970s. The film follows Pistone's undercover life as Donnie Brasco (Johnny Depp) and his association and subsequent friendship with low-chain hitman mobster Lefty Ruggiero (Al Pacino). In order to perform this role as convincingly as possible, Depp met the real Pistone, so that he could learn not only Pistone's mannerisms but also the mafia's vernacular speech and rules. Depp was critically acclaimed for his performance, and received several awards nominations.

With the exception of Joe D. Pistone/Donnie Brasco, many of his biopic characters are non-conformists who refused to live governed by society's rules. The main characters of Ted Demme's film *Blow* (2001) and Michael Mann's film *Public Enemies* (2009) are based on the real-life criminals George Jung and John Dillinger and their life stories. Whereas John Dillinger was a famous bank robber and gangster during the booming crime wave and economic downfall years following the Great Depression in the 1930s, George Jung was a drug dealer in the late 1970s. Both characters came from small towns and wished to achieve the American Dream of fame and fortune, even if it entailed leading unlawful lives. However, for pursuing their dream, they had to pay a high price: Dillinger was shot dead in a public street and Jung was charged with cocaine trafficking and, therefore imprisoned for several years. Like in his Jack Sparrow portrayal, Depp perceived these two characters as modern pirates or rock stars. Depp described Dillinger as "that era's rock and roll star. He was a very charismatic man and he lived the way he wanted to and didn't compromise."<sup>25</sup> For his role as Jung, Depp visited the real George Jung in prison on

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<sup>25</sup> Hiscock, John. "Johnny Depp Interview for Public Enemies". *The Telegraph*, (June 25, 2009) online access: 2 Jan. 2012

several occasions so as to draw upon his insider knowledge of the unpredictable existence of a cocaine smuggler and consequently to get inside the lifestyle of this character. Moreover, Depp was able to play the physical and emotional changes his character undergoes during the film. Despite the fact that both films were box office hits, the critics were less than complimentary about Depp's latter performance. While Depp was highly praised for his portrayal as Dillinger in *Public Enemies*, he received mixed reviews from critics for his role as Jung in *Blow*. In fact, critics were clearly divided over the character. On the one hand, his portrayal of Jung was seen as compelling and sympathetic. On the other, reviewers claimed that Depp's looks and effortless charm were too transparent, making his performance of a slick and shady lowlife criminal almost impossible to believe.

Sometimes Depp's adult non-conformist roles are played as insane misunderstood social outcasts with plenty of mannerisms or affectations. In *The Libertine* (2004), Depp stars in a biopic based on John Wilmot, the second Earl of Rochester, a 17<sup>th</sup> century poet. He is an adult man who sometimes behaves like a spoiled child, whose whims have to be indulged. John Wilmot is also not a very agreeable character since Depp portrayed a man who disregards his wife's feelings through a string of infidelities and he is directly responsible for one of his friend's death. In fact, John Wilmot is a womanizer, a drunk and a hedonist. He totally flouts King Charles II's authority by insulting and humiliating him in a play, a satire of the King's reign. As a result, he becomes a pariah, a social outcast and dies young of syphilis.

By 1998, Depp and writer Hunter S. Thompson, the founder of so-called gonzo journalism, had become friends. So it is not surprising that Depp decided to play Hunter S. Thompson's onscreen alter ego Raoul Duke in Terry Gilliam's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998). Depp lived in Thompson's basement for several months in order to observe and study his friend's character. In fact, he took Thompson's mannerisms and affectations so seriously that he still performed them off screen in future promotional interviews for the film. Gilliam more than once referred to Depp as "some kind of vampire. Each time he'd come back [from seeing Thompson] with more of Hunter's clothes and things. He was stealing Hunter's soul, really, secretly." (Robb 122) Depp himself admitted that "it took me a while to stop being Hunter." (Meikle 227). For his role as Raoul Duke, Depp changed drastically his physical appearance, becoming a middle-aged bald man constantly holding a cigarette in his mouth. The film was adapted from Hunter S. Thompson's 1971 novel of

the same title. It follows a road trip to Las Vegas of the oddball journalist Duke and his psychopathic lawyer Dr. Gonzo. The film is a fictionalized account of Thompson's experiences with drugs leading to a series of psychedelic drug-fuelled fantasies during a weekend journey to Las Vegas. In spite of the film's largely negative reviews and box office failure, Depp found it all a good personal experience. Not only was Depp good friends with Thompson until his death in 2005, but he also had the opportunity to meet and become friends with director, Terry Gilliam.

As a loyal friend and admirer, the actor was able to perform for the second time a character based on another Hunter S. Thompson's semi-autobiographical novel, in the film *The Rum Diary* (2011). The film is loosely inspired by Thompson's fictionalized life events during his short stay as a freelance reporter in Puerto Rico in the late 1950s. Paul Kemp is a much younger and idealistic onscreen version of Thompson. As a result, Depp delivered a slightly more nuanced performance from the one he gave as Raoul Duke. Depp portrays Paul Kemp as a disgruntled hard-drinking journalist who moves from New York to work for a Puerto Rico local newspaper in San Juan. In search of adventure, Kemp soon embraces his peers' lust for alcohol, especially rum. Once again Depp's performance received mixed reviews as it was obviously going to be compared with his previous Thompson *alter ego* performance in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Depp's attraction to real-life characters can be explained by his identification with some of their emotional state, as he had already faced similar inner conflicts himself. So, it is not surprising that some of his onscreen characters share a common denominator with Depp's teen and early adult life experiences: drugs addiction. He has frequently portrayed drug or drink addicted characters in films like *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), *Blow* (2001), *From Hell* (2001), *The Libertine* (2004) and *The Rum Diary* (2011).

Depp's cameos in small independent films are among some of his most extravagant and developed adult characters. Depp has performed seven cameos in films to date but his most popular ones are undoubtedly the gypsy Roux, Juliet Binoche's love interest/ prince charming, in *Chocolat* (2000), the double roles of Bon Bon and Lieutenant Victor in *Before Night Falls* (2000) and CIA agent Sheldon Sands in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003). Bon Bon is a quirky character, as Depp had to play a homosexual transvestite who rebels against the oppressive and dictatorial Cuban government in the 1960s. Under heavy make-up, wearing sexy clothes and high heels, Depp is almost unrecognizable. Lieutenant

Victor, a mischievous prison guard, is quite the opposite of Bon Bon. Depp was able to play a member of Fidel Castro's regime who enjoys being an oppressor of his victims and has peculiar sexual fetishes. For these roles, Depp was acclaimed by public audiences as well as reviewers. *Before Night Falls* is a film based on the Cuban poet and novelist Reinaldo Arenas' autobiographical book and follows the life of Arenas and his struggles against censorship and the suppression of human rights in Cuba in the 1970s. The film turned out to be a refreshing surprise, also bringing into the international spotlight the almost unknown and talented Spanish actor, Javier Bardem.<sup>26</sup>

Although Depp's cameos are minor characters, they seem to be amongst the best performances in the films, such as Depp's CIA agent Sands in Robert Rodriguez's final film of the "El Mariachi" trilogy, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003). Depp's brilliant performance overshadowed Antonio Banderas' performance. In fact, Banderas is reduced almost to a secondary character in his own film. The film is inspired by Sergio Leone's films and Depp's character is one of the first corrupt amoral characters Depp ever performed. CIA agent Sands is portrayed as a caustic outsider who is infatuated with strange and assorted disguises, cheesy tourist shirts and sampling the same pork dish in every Mexican bar. In the film, Sands is tortured by a Mexican drug cartel lord and ends up blind after his mission is compromised.

Although Depp is best known for his portrayal of quirky and good-hearted characters, the actor has also played the villain a few times in his acting career such as the orthodox astronaut Spencer Armacost in the sci-fi fiction thriller film, *The Astronaut's Wife* (1999) and the writer Mort Rainey in the psychological horror film *Secret Window* (2004). As a villain, Depp's performances weren't always as well received or as brilliantly performed as his child-at-heart characters. His performance in *The Astronaut's Wife*, for instance, was heavily criticized. However, Depp had the chance to play, for the first time, a villain, thus expanding his acting skill to the portrayal of a more conventional movie character.

Depp's villain, Mort Rainey, is the central character in the *Secret Window*, a film based on Stephen King's novella *Secret Window, Secret Garden* (1990). Mort Rainey is a successful writer who suffers a psychotic break when he catches his wife having an affair,

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<sup>26</sup> Javier Bardem was the fetish actor for some of the most memorable films of Spanish director Pedro Almodovar. For his outstanding performance as Arenas, Bardem won several awards and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actor in 2001.



resulting in the meltdown of his marriage. Depressed and secluded, he also suffers from writer's block. After several mysterious and misleading events, he kills his ex-wife and her lover with impunity and, eventually recovers from his block, thus producing a new book called *Secret Window*. David Koepp, director of the film, wrote the adaptation of Stephen King's novella having Depp in mind for the main character, due to the actor's ability to perform such lonely and tortured characters. In return, Depp was attracted to this project due to the challenge of acting mostly alone throughout the film. He was also interested in exploring the themes of a character's long-term confinement and his subsequent paranoia. This time, the reviewers praised Depp's successful performance as a villain claiming that he "does supply the film with its creepiest moments." (Meikle 372)

Depp's fondness for performing roles of eccentric writers like Mort Rainey, the real-life authors J.M. Barrie, John Wilmot, Hunter S. Thompson aka Raoul Duke and Paul Kemp, led him to accept the invitation to do a literary reading in 1999 called *The Source*. It is a documentary film about the Beat Generation writers of the 1950s and 1960s such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs and the influence of this literary movement on American cultural history. For this project, Depp recited passages from Jack Kerouac's work *On the Road*.

Although, in his youth, he had dreamt of becoming a famous punk rock star, Depp has never portrayed one onscreen. In fact, the closest he got to playing one was as the guitar player Roux in *Chocolat* (2000). However, he was asked by director Robert Rodriguez to compose a song for his character, CIA agent Sands, in *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003) which was included in the film's soundtrack. In 2009, Depp was the narrator of the documentary film *When You're Strange* about the life of the 1960s band The Doors and its charismatic lead singer and songwriter, Jim Morrison.

Because of his own Native-American ancestry, Depp has also exhibited a predilection for ethnic characters like William Blake in *Dead Man* (1995), Raphael in *The Brave* (1997) and Tonto in *Lone Ranger* (2013). Except for this upcoming film, they are independent low-budget films. They talk about Native American's problematic integration in American society and the subsequent discrimination they had to (still have to) face in the USA. With these films, Depp shows his social and political awareness.

In conclusion, Depp has developed three distinctly different approaches to characterization in his films. On the one hand, he has played the role straight, relying on

interior psychology and emotion such as in his portrayal of Mort Rainey in *Secret Window* (2004) or J.M. Barrie in *Finding Neverland* (2004). On the other hand, he has mimicked or accentuated the individual concerned especially in the case of role-playing the life of real people like Hunter S. Thompson or Georg Jung. His third acting approach has been a willingness to turn himself into an archetype, by adopting mannerisms from an eclectic mix of pop cultural influences either from rock or punk music, cartoon comics or TV series icons.

## **2. Working collaboration with Tim Burton**

Movies are a collaborative art form. And no collaboration is more crucial — or complex — than the one between auteur-director and his star. Often it can be an unstable alliance. Sometimes, however, it becomes a truly creative and fruitful partnership. In today's movies, perhaps the most fertile pairing is the one between Tim Burton and Johnny Depp. Together they have worked on eight films to date.

Both director and actor are almost the same age (Burton is just five years Depp's senior) and share a similar social caste and background. Burton's and Depp's teen years were given to artistic pursuits such as drawing and playing guitar, respectively. Whereas Burton had inhabited a more interior reclusive world, watching movies from an early age and evincing a particular bent for fantasy and horror, Depp had grown up with a passion for punk music and nightclubs. But as the two became better acquainted and close friends off screen, Depp would find much of his own thinking reflected in Burton's singular aesthetic while Burton, likewise, would come to regard Depp as his perfect onscreen persona. In fact, some critics have considered Depp Burton's muse. J. Smith and Clive Matthews called, for instance, Depp his "onscreen alter ego" (Smith & Matthews 168) and Paul Woods claimed him as "the filmmaker's oneiric image of himself" (Woods 8). *Sleepy Hollow* producer Scott Rudin once said that "basically Johnny Depp is playing Tim Burton in all his movies." (Salisbury 178) Furthermore, Depp himself has conveyed this idea more than once. After their first encounter and preceding conversation about their first film together, Depp was convinced that "this hypersensitive madman *is* Edward Scissorhands." (Salisbury foreword x) In fact, some of Depp's characters either resemble

Burton physically or his emotional landscape while he was growing up: Edward Scissorhands (Burton's appearance and his inability to communicate as a teenager), Ed Wood (Burton's relationship with Vincent Price), Ichabod Crane (Burton's battle with Hollywood's domineering studio system), Willy Wonka (Burton's relationship with his own father).

Although he doesn't consider himself strange at all,<sup>27</sup> Burton has continually created misfits or misunderstood characters that seem in some way autobiographical. This seems to suggest that Depp has also starred in a long string versions or variations of the same character: Edward the misfit or misunderstood social outcast.

Many critics have claimed that the director was the one who had a huge impact on the actor's successful career, since it was Burton who helped him finally drop the label of teen idol, redefining his image for a whole new audience. Depp was also not indifferent to this situation, later saying, "I owe the majority of whatever success I've been lucky enough to have to that one weird, wired meeting with Tim." (Salisbury foreword xi) Thanks to Burton, he would have the freedom to create and experiment.

It seems that the studios and film critics have had some doubts about Burton's casting of leading actors, most notably Johnny Depp in *Edward Scissorhands* and Michael Keaton in *Batman*, at the beginning of each film production. For Edward, the main character in *Edward Scissorhands*, the studios wanted to cast Tom Cruise instead of Johnny Depp. In spite of the studio's objections, Burton knew right away from his meeting with Depp that he was the right actor for the role because "he had that kind of quality, you could just see it in his eyes, and that was an important aspect to the character in terms of not having to say anything and just being able to project something simply, much like a silent movie actor." (Smith & Matthews 108) By then, Burton was identified as a risk-taker. At the time, Depp seemed like one of the oddest casting decisions Burton had ever made. Before playing Scissorhands, Depp hadn't had the opportunity to demonstrate the range, depth and character with which he is now automatically associated. However, after the film's release, everyone agreed that Burton's choice was the right one. Today, no one can imagine any other actor for the role of Edward.

Again, Depp was always Burton's first choice in *Ed Wood* (1994) and *Sleepy Hollow* (1999). Although the studio had preferred Brad Pitt and Liam Neeson (big stars

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<sup>27</sup> Fraga, Kristin, *Tim Burton Interviews*. 1<sup>st</sup> edition. University Press of Mississippi, 2005, p.131

with established box-office success) for the role of Ichabod Crane, Depp was again the only actor he ever wanted. Thanks to Depp's powerful performance in *Sleepy Hollow* as both a post-modern police detective dedicated to science, deduction and reason and an insecure man, the film became a big budget blockbuster and allowed Depp to be accepted by Hollywood studios in much more mainstream acting roles.

Certainly critics have often recognized the importance of Johnny Depp in Burton's work (Fig.10) For instance, *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) has definitely given Tim Burton his most profitable film project to date, thanks to Depp's increasing popularity with cinema's audiences as Captain Jack Sparrow in the films *Pirates of the Caribbean*. In all of the Burton's films he has worked in so far, he evinces a depth of comprehension for outlandish fantasy that he could never show in more sober films. Moreover, in *Sweeney Todd* (2007) for instance, Depp goes somewhat further, visiting the darkest murderous place of revenge instincts. As Edward or Wonka or the Mad Hatter, Depp physically transforms himself completely to adapt to Burton's model drawing. Burton once claimed, "Johnny is so great to work with and he's willing to do anything. That's what I love about him. I like chameleons; I like people who like to do different things. (...) I can see similarities in the characters Johnny's played, yet they're all different." (Woods 148).



Fig.10 Johnny Depp and Tim Burton - a long-lasting working partnership.

Arguably, Depp's obsession for playing chameleonic characters in a Burton film has led him to increasingly create over-the-top performances. Since *Ed Wood*, many of Depp's characters, like Wonka or Mad Hatter, have been played histrionically using a wide range of mannerisms, comic vocal techniques and several accents. Edward Scissorhands is the only exception. As a result, they seem to look deranged or seriously disturbed. They are

always craving for attention. That seems to be the only way Depp and Burton have managed to get audiences' attention. Depp's over-the-top performances in Burton's films were, nevertheless, so successful that he extended them to other directors' films such as the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series.

Both director and actor also share a strong sense of identification and close connection or some sort of involvement with the film's leading characters, especially the ones that have conflicts within themselves. For instance, in several interviews Burton reported that, "I've always felt it's best when things come from an emotional point, rather than if I think too much about something. (...) I feel much more secure doing things coming from a subconscious point of view. That's what I try to do with any character and most of the actors I work with." (Woods 148) Moreover, Burton even sees his films as cathartic due to the fact that through his work, he can release his innermost feelings, especially those related with his childhood and his strained relationship with his family.

Burton and Depp share a darkly humorous attitude toward his characters, as they often compared them with frightened girls, prissy wimpy guys or dogs, "Edward is like a dog to me" (McMahan 26) Depp once stated. When they were shooting *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), Depp wanted to portray Ichabod Crane using a long prosthetic nose, huge ears and elongated fingers in order to fully illustrate his character's ambiguous personality. Although Depp's suggestions for his character's physical appearance were not accepted by Burton, both actor and director agreed that Crane would be portrayed as a thirteen year old girl. In this way, they don't seem to mind that they can make fools of themselves. On the set of *Sleepy Hollow*, for instance, Scott Rudin, the producer, stated that Depp often referred himself as "Ichabod Crane: Girl Detective." (Fraga 133) This is not a surprise since Burton is not interested in his characters' masculinity. He is more interested in his characters' perception of the world and their strained relationships with society. Moreover, masculinity is all but irrelevant for the portrayal of a Burton character. In fact, the main characters' lack of conventional masculinity is a common trademark in a Burton film.

On the film set, the director usually likes to involve his actors in the construction of the characters without changing the original idea or script concept. And with Depp it is no different. By Depp's own account, "Burton allows you complete freedom to create a character from the ground up." (Robb 135) For instance, it was Depp's idea to reduce Edward's scripted dialogue to a minimum in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990). Depp has thus

often contributed to a Burton film by giving suggestions related to either the physicality or the mental development of the character. The point of view that both men bring to enrich the film's character, as well as their way of thinking, is thus similar. As Burton and Depp are men of few words, who respond much more to visual stimulus than the verbal, they usually draw to convey their ideas. For example, on *Alice in Wonderland* DVD, Depp stated that before filming, he and Burton made some Mad Hatter drawings which were coincidentally very similar, although they were countries apart when they drew them.

Never before did Depp show any other hidden talent onscreen, such as for dancing or singing. With Burton, Depp risks all: "He is a brother, a friend, my godson's father. He is an unique and brave soul, someone that I would go to the ends of the earth for, and I know, full and well, he would do the same for me." (Salisbury foreword xvii) There is a clear sense of loyalty and deep respect for each other's personality and work. These feelings seem to abound at any press interview or whenever they have to talk about their collaborative partnership. Clearly, there is a reciprocal trust which is growing with each film they have made together.

Although they both live in European cities (Burton in London and Depp in Paris) far away from the Hollywood spotlight, they still do alternatively family-oriented mainstream films and very personal gothic films. Both Burton and Depp have so far managed to maintain their artistic integrity and a sense of self in an industry known for undermining both these values. Their integrity, along with a profound personal respect for each other, is probably the key to their long lasting professional success.

### **3. Working collaboration with other Hollywood directors**

Johnny Depp has portrayed very similar characters to those he played in Burton's films during his collaboration with other directors. *Finding Neverland* (2004) and *The Pirates* series, for instance, are films that might have easily been directed by Burton since the characters of J.M. Barrie and Jack Sparrow are similar to some of Burton's characters. Both films deal with fantasy, the power of the imagination and the concept of being forever young. Moreover, they portray misfit characters that prefer to live in a fantastic world and,

as a result, they resist being fully integrated into an adult world. And these are definitely Burtonian concerns.

Unlike Burton, however, Depp has chosen to play other archetypal characters besides the childlike ones. He has tried to star in more mature roles whose characters would eventually grow up. Raphael in *The Brave* (1997), Mort Rainey in *Secret Window* (2004), John Wilmot in *The Libertine* (2004), John Dillinger in *Public Enemies* (2009) are just a few examples of adult misfit characters. Although they are not fully integrated in the social environment they belong to, they have problems that are associated with adulthood and moral engagement rather than adolescent preoccupations.

Depp has sought over the last three decades to work for both independent filmmakers like John Waters in *Cry Baby* (1990) and hire-on-demand studio directors such as Gore Verbinski in *The Pirates* series. By Depp's own account, he has chosen his films because of the characters, the director or the other leading actors he has the opportunity to work with. Besides Tim Burton, Depp has acted for other respected directors. Among the illustrious names with whom he has worked are Terry Gilliam and Roman Polanski.

Under Terry Gilliam's directorial skills, Depp played Hunter S. Thompson's alter ego, Raoul Duke in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), a cameo as Tony in *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (2009) and Toby Grosini in the unfinished, doomed project *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*. Both director and actor have remained friends since their first project together in 1998. Gilliam was just finishing his film *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, when the Australian actor Heath Ledger, the film's main character, died unexpectedly in 2008. Depp was the first actor Gilliam had recruited to play the remaining final shooting scenes of Tony. Both Gilliam and Depp have a mutual respect or admiration for each other. Gilliam more than once referred to Depp's acting as an "osmosis" (Meikle 226), adding that "he's capable of anything – there's no limit to his abilities." (Robb 125)

With Polanski, Depp has played Dean Corso in *The Ninth Gate* (1999). Dean Corso is a cynical rare books dealer hired by a scholar specialist in books on Satanism to recover the only two remaining copies of a seventeenth-century text with cryptic illustrations which were supposedly drawn by Lucifer himself. Unlike Burton or Gilliam, who are clearly open to new ideas or improvisations on the film set, Polanski is known for his ability to maintain control over all elements of production associated with his films.

Additionally, Polanski insisted on guiding Depp's performance in a more focused way than most of Depp's previous directors. Depp was not able to give any suggestions to improve Dean Corso's character, as he had frequently done while working with Burton. Consequently, he was not involved in every stage of his character's development process. The atmosphere was extremely tense during the film's shooting. Indeed, his working experience with Polanski was not a very pleasant one. Depp once admitted that "It wasn't an easy film to make. Roman is pretty set in his ways. There's no opportunity for discussion or collaboration. He was definitely a bit too rigid for my liking." (Robb 131).

Depp has also been keen on working with famous iconic actors like Marlon Brando, Robert Mitchum, Jerry Lewis, Christopher Plummer, Christopher Walken, Al Pacino and Dustin Hoffman. Accordingly, he has chosen films from inexperienced directors like Jeremy Leven's *Don Juan DeMarco* (1995) because they allowed him the possibility of working with fellow actors he truly admires and respects. In return, Depp was highly praised by these talented veteran actors. For instance, during the production of *Finding Neverland* (2004), Dustin Hoffman stated that "Johnny Depp has a quality that I find very admirable: he tries everything in his power not to be a star. He takes chances. He eludes being a pin up." (Forster, *Finding Neverland* DVD, 2005)

Depp has also developed a long last friendship with some of them, including with the legendary actor, Marlon Brando, who described Depp as "one of the greatest actors of his generation." (Meikle 187) Depp had the opportunity to work with Brando, one of the icons of his childhood, in three films: *Don Juan DeMarco* (1995), the failed project *Divine Rapture* (1996) and Depp's film debut as director in *The Brave* (1997). Their friendship lasted till Brando's death in 2004. Many reviewers have more than once regarded Depp, perhaps rather fancifully, as Brando's successor.

Over the years, he has also exhibited a predilection for working with maverick directors like Julian Schnabel or Jim Jamursch. Whereas Depp played a double cameo in Schnabel's *Before Night Falls* (2000), he portrayed the main character in Jamursch's *Dead Man* (1995), the loner accountant William Blake. *Dead Man* is shot in black and white. It was dubbed by Jamursch as a "psychedelic" western film with a minimalist plot. The film portrays Native American culture and is a metaphor for how society as a whole creates outcasts through incomprehension and prejudice. Both directors are known for their experimental works and they share Depp's musical and literary tastes. Despite the fact that



their films are often critically acclaimed and widely commended at Film Festivals, they usually fail to reach mass audiences.

Sometimes, Depp has chosen risk-taking films with independent European directors who, even though they were less well known in America, were popular and critically acclaimed in Europe such as Emir Kusturica and Lasse Hallström. In fact, Depp was so confident about these directors' talents, that he played the leading roles of the disenfranchised outsider Axel Blackmar and the misfit and confused Gilbert Grape for their first Hollywood film debuts, *Arizona Dream* (1993) and *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (1993) respectively. Despite their failure at the box office, from then on, reviewers began to look at Depp as a seriously gifted consistent rising actor.

He has worked with some of Hollywood's gifted young directors like Robert Rodriguez, Marc Forster, Gore Verbinski. Just as with Burton, Depp's working experience with Gore Verbinski has been a creative and highly productive one. They had worked in five films to date: *The Pirates of the Caribbean* first three films, *Rango* (2011)<sup>28</sup> and the still-to-be-released *Lone Ranger* (2013). In the meantime, Depp and Verbinski have developed a close friendship and share the same artistic sensibility and musical background as well. Like Depp, Verbinski was another ex-Punk band member, who often plays guitar with a band as a free time activity.

It seems that Depp is turning his back on his American residence since, at the turn of the twenty-first century, Depp decided to live in France and to participate more and more in film productions whose sets are in European countries or in the West Indies. Many of his European films' production settings are: in England, *The Libertine*, *Finding Neverland* and *Alice in Wonderland*; in France, *Chocolat* and *The Ninth Gate*; in Italy, *The Tourist*; in Hungary, *From Hell*. One of the reasons behind his choice of roles in Europe has probably to do with a taste for working outside Hollywood or off American soil. Indeed, in Europe, he is able to achieve the freedom that had so often eluded him: to live as an ordinary person rather than be constantly pestered by American press that watches his every move. By living and working outside Hollywood, he can provide a sort of stability for his family.

Some of his recent role choices are directly related with money rather than with his

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<sup>28</sup> Depp was the voice of the main character, Rango. It was his second animated film, after *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* (2005) and it won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Picture in February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

artistic sensibilities, as is exemplified by *The Tourist* (2010) and *The Pirates of the Caribbean* film series (2003-2011). Depp is still very keen on playing Jack Sparrow for several years to come due to the character's popularity with audiences. In fact, Depp has recently stated that he would play the role for as long as it is popular with the public, in the Cannes press launch of the fourth film.<sup>29</sup> However, by persistently choosing the leading roles in such type of films, his acting career can perilously be at risk to become stagnated since these roles don't bring anything new.

To sum up, overall, since he became an actor, Depp has developed from a reluctant teen pin-up into a modern cinematic icon. He tends to choose films which are creatively challenging and he feels passionate about. He has patience to wait for the right project to arrive. Accordingly, he has worked with young ground-breaking directors as well as iconic or highly acclaimed directors. Above all, the actor definitely likes to experiment and innovate.

As far as Depp's choice of more mainstream roles is concerned, Depp is still very interested in choosing roles of freakishly eccentric outcasts whose oddities are easily misunderstood by society. The Mad Hatter in *Alice in Wonderland* and Willy Wonka in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* are among some of Depp's best accomplished performances in recent years. However, one can argue that it is Depp's ability to portray less histrionic and more mature characters (even though still eccentric) in less mainstream films like in *The Libertine* or *Secret Window* that successfully shows his most outstanding acting skills and, consequently, his growth as a talented actor.

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<sup>29</sup> "Johnny Depp pledges future to 'Pirates of the Caribbean'", *NME Films & TV News*, (May 16, 2011). Online access: 10 Jan. 2012

## Chapter III – Influence on Modern Cinema

### 1. Film genres, narrative and technical elements

Tim Burton has always been regarded as a peculiar Hollywood director. He is a deeply personal filmmaker who makes successful movies. From early on his career, his work has become such an identifiable brand that it was termed as “Burtonesque”. Today, this term is ascribed to any filmmaker whose work shows both dark gothic atmospheres and quirky misfit characters. Like many filmmakers, he relies on key collaborators to help him with his vision, most notably, Danny Elfman, who has scored nearly all his feature films, Rick Heinrichs, who has designed many of his film sets, and Johnny Depp, who has played some of his most eccentric characters and consequently is viewed by some critics as his onscreen alter ego.

Over the past thirty years, Tim Burton has helped to reinvent Hollywood genre filmmaking by melding the fantastic, the horrific and the comic in his films. Burton often likes to combine genres in each film he makes. He is definitely fond of certain genres of films such as fairy tales, horror, fantasy and musicals, although he has also made action films, science fiction films, biopic and animated films. Whereas *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) is both a gothic horror film and a fantasy film, *Charlie and Chocolate Factory* (2005) is seen as a fairy tale, a comedy and a musical film. His most recent film, *Dark Shadows* (2012) is, according to Richard D. Zanuck, one of its producers, “a supernatural horror comedy action picture.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, Burton’s predilection for blending film genres in his filmography has become a quite common feature in contemporary American cinema. Alison McMahan has labelled these films as “*pataphysical films*”<sup>31</sup> (McMahan 3) and sees Burton as a key contributor to this genre. In her view, *pataphysical films* are a new genre which appeared as early as in the 1980s. Burton’s films seem to possess *pataphysical films*’ common features, such as the use of special effects in a blatant way, thin plots and characters, “because the narrative relies more on intertextual, nondiegetic references” (McMahan 3) from outside of the world of the story. *Pataphysical films* follow an alternative narrative logic, “the narrative logic of animation” (McMahan 4) instead of the traditional narrative

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<sup>30</sup>Jordan, Richard. “Dark Shadows-Blood Lines”, *Total Film*, (May 2012), issue 192, p.88

<sup>31</sup> McMahan appropriates a manifesto from the French *Collège de Pataphysique*, a branch of the Surrealist art movement, founded in 1948. The term was invented by Alfred Jarry.

logic, the linear Aristotelian narrative. These films are focused on “transformation rather than plot development”.(McMahan 4) *Pataphysical films* have a self-awareness, often a comedic one, and occupy a space beyond and transcending genre - mixing approaches and images from a variety of past films and genres. It seems that *pataphysical films* are also predominantly commercial films as is testified by Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996), or Stephen Sommers's *Van Helsing* (2004). This author writes that these films are attacked by critics because they do not contain deep characterization, strong plots, or many of the elements that are traditional markers of quality.

Burton's films, therefore, clearly fall into this genre. *Mars Attacks!* (1996), for instance, combines genres, inasmuch as it can be categorized as a screwball comedy, a disaster movie and a science fiction film, or a science fiction spoof like Mel Brooks' *Spaceballs* (1987).<sup>32</sup> It is a commercial film produced within the Hollywood studio system and there are a lot of cameos by several contemporary stars. The film follows the classic alien invasion movie-formula: an army of evil, ugly extraterrestrial creatures invade Earth and use their powerful and technologically advanced weapons to eliminate the human race and destroy Earth's buildings. However, its plot shows a number of inverted elements characteristic of a parody, mainly a political spoof. President James Dale, for example, misunderstanding the gravity of the situation, uses the landing of Martians in the US as a photo opportunity, and the Martians reduce the entire US Congress to smoldering fluorescent red and congressmen to green skeletons. In fact, the key political figures are not simply burned. They are killed inventively, with panache and a high degree of humor. There are some pop cultural inter-filmic references and allusions, such as the monstrous aliens shown as Frankenstein-creators that carry out several experiments on humans and animals alike. The film also recycles famous sequences from well-known 1960s science fiction B-movies, amongst which the appearance of the Martians' spaceships is reminiscent of *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* (1956) and much of Pierce Brosnan's dialogue appears to have been picked up from *The Day The Earth Stood Still* (1951). Furthermore, in *Mars Attacks!* special effects are used crudely, inasmuch as they look cheap and rudimentary, resembling many of 1950s B-movies' special effects. Also the Martians' jerking

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<sup>32</sup> In fact, many reviewers regarded *Mars Attacks!* as a science fiction spoof of Roland Emmerich's film *Independence Day* (1986) which had been previously released during that summer holiday season.

movements are very similar to the skeletons' movements in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), being something of a homage to Ray Harryhausen's work.

His pataphysical films, especially his early films like *Beetlejuice* (1988) and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), have set standards that many others have imitated. He successfully tries to undermine traditional film genres and turns them into something fresh each time. There is evident adolescent glee in the way our political and social leaders are dispatched.

In many of his films he tells a fairly simple story which is immediately accessible for spectator regardless of age or background. This seems to be one of the reasons why he uses fairy tales so often in his films. Burton's declared interest in fairy tales is well known. He stated on several occasions that the reason he likes fairy tale so much as a form is "what I get out of fairy tales, folk tales, myths, are these extreme images, very heightened, but with some foundation to them. (...) There's a certain amount of symbolism, a certain amount of interpretation and abstraction which I appreciate. I much prefer to connect with something on a subconscious level that to intellectualize about it." (Salisbury 94)

He has, thus, adopted fairy tales elements in several of his films' stories. *Big Fish* (2003), for instance, has such miscellaneous characters as a witch (Helena Bonham Carter's Jenny young and senior), a giant man and numerous characters that belong to a circus like Pig and Ting (the Siamese sisters), clowns and even a werewolf (Danny de Vito's Amos Calloway). In *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), Ichabod Crane faints at the end, after defeating the Headless Horseman. Like *Sleepy Beauty*, he is awakened by Katrina's kiss. The *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) story strongly draws on several fairy tales, especially the *Beauty and the Beast*. Furthermore, both *Edward Scissorhands* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* have an ever present narrator, an elderly person who begins to tell the main character's story to his grandchildren at the beginning of the film. This framing device only reinforces the idea that these films are to be considered as modern fairy tales.

Fairy tales as well as myths and legends date back to Ancient times and were transmitted orally from generation to generation. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a nationalistic awareness and, thus a renewed interest for fairy tales. They were collected and published by Charles Perrault, The Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Andersen. As a result, they became well-recognized literary works. There are many different theories concerning the fairy tale's psychological meaning and value, but most start with the

premise that the stories are symbolic expressions of the human mind and emotional experience. According to this view, fairy tale plots and motifs are not representations of socio-historical reality, but symbols of inner experience that provide insight into human behavior. Many modern psychological approaches to fairy tales are usually associated with Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>33</sup> Freud found fairy tales useful for illustrating his theories of the mind because they seemed so much like dreams. According to Freud, both fairy tales and dreams used symbols to express the conflicts, anxieties, and forbidden desires that had been repressed into the unconscious.<sup>34</sup>

As far as his animated films are concerned, Burton worked for Disney as an animator and conceptual artist early in his career as a filmmaker. Not only did he learn his craft well, but also all the main techniques of narrative story-telling in fairy tales, including the main features of characterization. Both Burton's and Disney female animated characters, for instance, are portrayed as highly sexualized young girls with small waists and big breasts. Disney's Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and Beauty in *The Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and Burton's Sally in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and Bride in the *Corpse Bride* (2005) are just a few examples of this dominant "American" style of stereotyping, which shares some features with the Playboy bunny.

However, there are differences between Disney and Burton's films, especially in the psychological portrayal of their female characters. Disney's female characters, like Ariel and Belle, are subordinate to males' power and their rebellion and dreams all turn out, at the end, to be rewarded by attracting and marrying a handsome prince. Burton's animated female characters, on the other hand, like Sally and Bride, rebel against this fate in a man's world and against his oppressive power and eventually forge their own destiny. In Bride's case, she even refuses to be married to Victor and doesn't end up with the prince charming. Another example of Burton's different portrayal of his female animated characters is a comparison between Belle and Sally. Belle is imprisoned and endures brutish behaviour from the Beast. But, as the story goes on, she interprets his rage and anger as simply expressions of bad temper and in turn discovers underneath a personality

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<sup>33</sup> According to Bruno Bettelheim, author of *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), the old gory fairy tales prepare children – in a subconscious Freudian way – for life. He believed that emotional growth and maturation was aided by the reading of traditional fairy tales. For Bettelheim, fairy tales are existential dramas in which children subconsciously confront their own problems and desires on the path to adulthood. <<http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/07/pkatz1/itw/jack/uses.pdf>>

<sup>34</sup> Following Freud's theories, especially the Oedipus complex theory, Otto Rank examined mythological and fairy tale heroes and proposed that fairy tales are adult projections of childhood fantasies. <<http://cerenitynow.wordpress.com/2009/08/28/fairy-tales-critical-theory-and-archetypal-interpretation/>>

that is tender and vulnerable. She then falls in love with him. Burton's Sally is also imprisoned by the evil scientist, Dr. Finklestein, and endures his oppressive and violent behaviour. However, she doesn't overlook his abusive behaviour and she doesn't feel empathy for her abductor. On the contrary, she eventually escapes him with no regrets. Emphatically, she does not fall in love with her oppressor.

Physically speaking, Burton's main male animated characters are also different from Disney's characters, mainly in how their eyes are sketched. Whereas in Disney, all its characters have eyes, Burton's male character, Jack Skellington in *Nightmare Before Christmas* has no eyes at all, but two large black holes, instead. According to Burton, it was his seditious way of distancing himself from Disney and conveying the characters' emotions, dryly stating that "after drawing all those foxes with their wet drippy eyes at Disney, there was a little subversion in having these characters with no eyes. It was funny to think of a character that had these big black holes and to try and make that work." (Salisbury 116).

It was during his time at Disney that Burton's ability to retell a well-known fairy tale was discovered. He realized that fairy tales had lost some of their power and symbolic meaning in today's world. For Burton, Disney was to be blamed for this because Disney has been "sanitizing them to a great degree. I don't know how it happened, but people use the terms fairy tale now to mean something good or something just for children ... the term is so loosely bandied about." (Smith & Matthews 101) Therefore, while still working for Disney, he directed for television *Hansel and Gretel* (1982) and *Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp* (1984), a TV episode for Showtime's *Faerie Tale Theatre*. Both films were his first attempts (though unsuccessful ones) not only to take a different and refreshing approach to the fairy tale formula but also to target children and adult audiences alike. For instance, in *Hansel and Gretel*, Burton relocated the story from the German Black Forest to a highly stylized Japanese world and his cast were all Japanese non-professional actors. Moreover, he applied both archetypical elements of Japanese culture, including martial arts battles, and recurrent Burtonesque obsessions such as the Godzilla monster and clowns.

A certain amount of criticism of Burton's films is related to his inability to tell a coherent story or follow a linear plot, storytelling being the weakest link in any Burton film. But Burton's main concern is for his characters and their innermost complex feelings,

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not for clarity of storytelling. For Burton, it is important how the characters feel, connect and react to events that come upon them. For that reason, he sometimes applies plot subversion to the linear narrative by inverting its codes. In fact, it is his noticeable disregard for specific cinematic codes that provide him with some of his most original works as is exemplified by *Edward Scissorhands* and *Big Fish*.

Many of Burton's films present open or brutal and violent endings, instead of closed and happily-ever-after endings, a recurrent trademark in today's fairy tale films, especially the ones released by Disney. In *Edward Scissorhands*, for instance, there is no such ending for Edward. Edward's end is to move away from Kim and the Bogges family and thus to become incarcerated in the huge Gothic Castle where he was created. In many films such as this one, Burton likes to leave his audience imagining the leading characters' lives after the film is over. Furthermore, according to Burton, "tacked-on happy endings are psychotic in a way." (Salisbury 17) As a result, many endings in his films are open to different interpretations, thus enabling the audience and reviewers to brood over them. Besides the ending in *Edward Scissorhands*, perhaps the most controversial ending Tim Burton was able to produce was the final twist in the *Planet of the Apes* (2001). At the same time, Burton's films' open endings also show his quirky dark humor. In *Beetlejuice*, (Fig.11) for example, the film ends up with the ghost Betelgeuse aka Beetlejuice in the afterlife waiting room foolishly angering a witch doctor, who then sprinkles a magical powder over Beetlejuice's head causing it to shrink. This afterlife waiting room is for deceased people who wait endlessly their turn to have an appointment with a consultant/adviser. After this appointment, people will know their future mission in the afterlife. This opened ending seems to suggest that you shouldn't tick off a witch doctor or you will have to endure a destiny worse than death for long years to come. Burton's protagonists are incapable of circumspection, however.

Another example of Burton's ability to effectively invert or break the established linear narrative code is presented in *Beetlejuice*. (Fig.11) The title character of the film, for example, is held back until halfway through the film's story. By contrast, filmic narrative codes present the leading characters at the beginning of the film. Moreover, this ghost doesn't seem to have unsolved issues or a quest to overcome. However, according to convention, central characters should present major concerns and motivations. It also dictates that main characters should only die at the end, but Adam and Barbara Maitland,



the key characters of *Beetlejuice*, die in a car crash at the beginning of the film. This inversion of classic narrative conventions, where the leading characters initially die, turned out to be an inspiration for later films like *Ghost* (1990) and *Sixth Sense* (1999). Except for *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* (1985), death is a recurrent theme in a Burton film and it is seen as a natural event in a character's life. An uncommon number of Burton's films also deal with life after death, or death-in-life.



Fig.11 Michael Keaton as the wicked ghost Betelgeuse in *Beetlejuice* (1988).

Overall, he has used fairy tales in his films in order to reinvent them for a more modern cynical world, thus, creating unforgettable and mesmerizing characters. As a result, Burton employs fairy tales and allegoric forms as the most effective way of sublimating his personal themes and obsessions and, at the same time, to show the persistence of innocence in that world.

There has been a resurgence of fairy tales in today's cinema from large scale and large budget Hollywood films such as the *Shrek* series (2001-10), *Enchanted* (2007), *Red Riding Hood* (2011) and *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) to international and independent titles such as *Hansel and Gretel* (2002), *Stardust* (2007), *Red: Werewolf Hunter* (2010), and *Grimm's Snow White* (2012). To this one might add the strongly legendary elements of *The Golden Compass* cycle. However, most of these films seem to follow Disney's traditional approach in the way they use the fairy tale formula. Their selling point seems to be the introduction of eye-catching techniques in CGI. Almost no other modern filmmaker has tried to be as rebellious as Burton in the creation of contemporary fairy tales.

Burton possesses the ability to take his inspiration from his childhood 1960s B-movies from Hammer films and Roger Corman – Vincent Price films and go on to produce high-concept movies. His films resemble those films' gothic atmospheres which he used to

admire when he was a teenager. But Burton blends some horrific supernatural elements with his dark quirky sense of humor, in films such as *Vincent* (1982) *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) and *Dark Shadows* (2012). Indeed, Burton's gothic styled films contain the visual and emotional elements of Gothic nature but do not encapsulate the modern ideas of the genre of horror or gore. Even though the topics of death and the slight overtones of the morbidity come out in his films he does not fit the contemporary horror/slasher film genre.

Tim Burton was also one of the first filmmakers of his generation to create modern gothic films casting gothic teen characters. *Beetlejuice*'s Lydia Deetz and Edward in *Edward Scissorhands* were the first teen goth characters to be associated with these films. In fact, Johnny Depp was labelled by many reviewers as Hollywood's first gothic teen idol, preceding some of today's young gothic teen icons such as actor Robert Pattinson, the teen vampire Edward Cullen from *The Twilight Saga* (2008-12) film series. These Burtonian characters are portrayed as shrewd teens, a quality that mature adults seem to lack. Lydia Deetz, for example, is able to communicate with the newly deceased and good-natured ghosts, the Maitlands. Innocent and endearing Edward in *Edward Scissorhands* is found living alone in a gothic castle and is dressed up in a leather black suit that strikes a deep contrast against the everyday pastel-colored suburban town. In a way, by revealing weird or alienated characters to theatre audiences as anti-heroes instead of villains or as acceptable popular characters, it seems that Burton is a forerunner of modern teen gothic films like *The Crow* (1995), *Ginger Snaps* (2000), *Let the Right One In* (2008), *Kick-Ass* (2010) and *The Twilight Saga* film series. It is also an influence perpetuated in today's TV series like *Supernatural* (2005-), *True Blood* (2008-) or *Vampire Diaries* (2009-).<sup>35</sup> Coincidentally or not, Burton's recent film *Dark Shadows* (2012) can be perceived as an ironic commentary on this trend of contemporary American teen gothic films and TV series.

Burton is a director who thinks like an artist. In fact, many reviewers have often called his unique visual gothic style "poetic weirdness" (Smith & Matthews 265). His quirky sense of design complements rather than detracts from the story. He freely uses dark Gothic imagery and applies aesthetic visual techniques based on German

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<sup>35</sup> Catherine Spooner claims that Gothic is today's teenage genre of choice and its teenage characters are more likely to be portrayed as demons than victims. She also argues "the role of the outsider is rewritten to appeal to an audience who buys into alienation en masse and elevates the geek to chic." (Spooner 29).

Expressionism and Pop Surrealism in his film settings. Consequently, Burton contributed to the resurgence (or revival) of such artistic movements in movie culture, creating gloomy and mysterious settings, magical atmospheres.

Burton once admitted he is not an action film director by stating “me directing action is a joke; I don’t like guns. I hear a gunshot and I close my eyes.” (Salisbury 114) However, he has done more than a few films which required extended action sequences like the *Batman* films, *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) or *Planet of the Apes* (2001). He also shot two commercials for Time I-Control watches named *Kung Fu* and *Mannequin* (2000). These two ads were *Matrix*-like in tone, with plenty of fighting sequences. In other words, he has shot action sequences in films because action sequences have become *de rigueur* for modern mass film audiences.

Many of his films can be regarded as essentially live-action animated films. Rick Heinrichs, the production designer and Burton’s regular collaborator, confirms this perception by stating that “Tim and I created *Sleepy Hollow* like a big stop-motion animated movie.” (McMahan 74) Thus, he applies stop-motion inspirational techniques from Ray Harryhausen’s films like *Jason and the Argonauts* (Don Chaffey, 1963) in *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure* (1985), *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Mars Attacks!* (1996), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005). By applying many techniques which are associated with stop-motion animation, Burton and Heinrichs have been able to create stunning production design and unique mises-en-scène.

Burton’s love for stop-motion techniques in animated films enabled him to revitalize the form in contemporary American cinema. He used them in his first film debut, the short animated picture *Vincent* (1982), while still working for Disney. *Vincent* was a tridimensional animation feature which was very unusual for Disney animation films at the time. He also used them as a producer of the full-length animated feature *Tim Burton’s The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and later as a director in *Tim Burton’s Corpse Bride* (2005). In October 2012, *Frankenweenie*, his second full-length animated feature, will be released again using the same animation technique. *Tim Burton’s The Nightmare Before Christmas* wasn’t a big box office hit at first. However, in the years since its release it has become a holiday favourite for many viewers. This handcrafted art has been increasingly popular in the making of musical video clips as well. For instance, Burton used stop-motion animated techniques when the band The Killers invited him to direct their musical

video *The Bones* (2006). Burton even directed TV commercial spots by using this animation technique in a French chewing gum commercial called *Hollywood Gum* aka *The Gnome* (1998). By helping to revitalize stop-motion techniques in Hollywood, which were considered by many to be an almost dead art form in the 1980s, Burton's work anticipates recent American films such as Shane Acker's *9* (2009), Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009) and Henry Selick's *Coraline* (2009).

In the United Kingdom, Nick Park's Aardman Animation Studios have also played an important role in the revival of stop-motion techniques from 1989 onwards, in films like *Wallace and Gromit: A Grand Day Out* (1989), *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005), *Chicken Run* (2000) and in innumerable television works and commercials. Although the Aardman Studios are not located in Hollywood, its films have become commercially successful worldwide due to their lovable comic wit, in contrast to Burton's grotesque figures and fantastic worlds. Whereas Burton's stop motion animated films often seem to be self-regarding and dark, Park's films come across as sane and sunny. Burton's and Park's films seem to appeal to children and grown up audiences alike, but Park's work projects an innocence which is not haunted or persecuted.

For several years, Burton admitted to not being a fan of computer-generated animation and he even seemed to show angst about CGI techniques, preferring the more traditional approach of building real sets or resorting to old school techniques such as oversized props and miniatures or puppets in stop-motion animation. From Burton's point of view, stop-motion techniques enable him to make animated characters act and become as real as possible. Furthermore, with this technique Burton is able to produce "that hand-made feel that's just kind of subconscious and visceral about people moving an inanimate object and bringing life to it. There is something special about that." (Robb 202) However, nowadays, more often than not, he is using CGI elements in his films. He started to use them on the creation of the Martians while he was shooting *Mars Attacks!* (1996). From that moment on, his experience with them was favorable enough to convince him that, "in some ways, the technique doesn't really matter. I wanted to go for a "feeling" of the stop-motion that I grew up on. Now, we're able to achieve that feeling in a few different ways... [with CGI] I didn't have to do much about cumbersome sets-ups. It was really cool, real easy." (Smith & Matthews 199) Nevertheless, in a world dominated by computerized visual effects, he still keeps coming back to these detailed and handcrafted

techniques because, for him, this cinematic art is the one which can best convey the innermost feelings of his characters.

Music has an important role in a Burton film, inasmuch as it successfully emphasizes Burton's fantastic emotional coloring of his worlds. It also aids in the expression of an idea more comprehensively than would any dialogue, however masterfully written. Burton introduced Danny Elfman to the Hollywood film industry, when he invited him to produce the musical score for *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* in 1985. Since then, Elfman has become Burton's regular collaborator, providing scores for every Burton project, except *Ed Wood* and *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Together, Burton and Elfman have created some of the best, most menacing or nostalgic soundtracks of the last twenty years' cinema, among them *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Sleepy Hollow* and the first two *Batman* series. They also created some of the most recognizable movie themes in today's cinema.

Many of Elfman's musical scores were inspired by other memorable 20th century film soundtracks. For instance, in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Elfman used as a musical quote or citation the central musical piece from Stanley Kubrick's *2001- A Space Odyssey* (1968), especially when the boy Mike TeaVee is shrunk by a teleporter he uses on himself. *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* has references to *Chariots of Fire*'s title musical theme, when Pee-Wee dreams of winning a race with his bicycle early on in the film. Some sequences of Burton's film also resemble Alfred Hitchcock's film soundtracks. For instance, after Pee-Wee's bike is stolen, there are some echoes of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). Elfman is a fan of Hitchcock's regular composer, Bernard Herrmann. As a matter of fact, Elfman and Burton have often compared their creative partnership to that of musician Bernard Herrmann and director Alfred Hitchcock, since they too had also had a major disagreement after working successfully together for many years.<sup>36</sup>

Burton's interest in the Musical led him to make films like *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber on Fleet Street* or the full-length stop-motion animated features *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride*. Elfman's accomplished work has also inspired other directors' film scores, like Christopher Nolan's for *Batman Begins* (2005). They became so popular that one can hear them in several TV commercials. For instance,

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<sup>36</sup> Whereas Herrmann and Hitchcock had a major creative disagreement over *Torn Curtain* (1966) and never worked together again, Elfman and Burton disagreed in the pre-production of *Ed Wood* (1994). However, both composer and director are still working as a team.

*Beetlejuice*'s soundtrack has been frequently used in comedy and animated film trailers like *A Bug's Life* (1998) or *Monster's House* (2006), *Edward Scissorhands*'s musical score has been often chosen for famous modern fantasy film trailers such as *Limony Snicket's – A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004) or *The Ladykillers* (2004). Additionally, *The Planet of the Apes* (2001) score has been used in major blockbuster franchise films like *Spiderman* (2002), *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003) and *X2: X-Men* (2003). Without Elfman's distinctive musical touch, neither *Edward Scissorhands* nor *Batman Returns* would communicate the same dramatic impact on the audience.

Besides working with Burton, Elfman has also composed numerous films scores for other directors including Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man 2* (2004) and Gus Van Sant's *Milk* (2008). Additionally, Elfman has written the theme music for several television series including *Desperate Housewives* (2004). His most famous television series musical theme, *The Simpsons* (1989), is mostly known for the cacophonous sounds of the city, the use of brass, discordance and tunelessness within tunefulness, rapid pacing and modern rather than symphonic orchestrations with strings. Overall, Danny Elfman has been giving a major contribution to modern American cinema by composing such powerful musical masterpieces.

## **2. Popular culture and stereotypical characters**

Burton has always shown an enthusiasm for pop culture by making frequent use of popular references and allusions in his films. For instance, visually and conceptually, the film *Mars Attacks!* is based on bubble-gum trading cards (Fig.12) of the same name, first released by The Topps Company Inc in the 1960s. The villain and corrupt entrepreneur, Max Shreck, played by Christopher Walker in *Batman Returns* (1992), was named after the movie horror actor Max Shreck who played Dracula in F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). Burton had also secured the services of the punk goth band Sioux and The Banshees for the film's soundtrack. In *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* there are references to, for example, Godzilla in one of Pee-Wee's dreams after his bike was stolen. When Pee-Wee is racing away with his bike from the Warner Brothers studio in a chase sequence, there is also a clear reference to the image of Elliot and E.T.'s bike flight to the forest

encircled by the Moon in Spielberg's *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial* (1982)<sup>37</sup>. Welsh singer Tom Jones' famous song "It's not unusual" was used twice in Burton's films, in *Edward Scissorhands* and in *Mars Attacks!* (in which Jones also appears).



Fig.12 *Mars Attacks!* - bubble-gum trading cards released by The Topps Company Inc in the 1960s.

It appears that many of Burton's leading characters are borrowed from a variety of literary and cinematic sources and can be traced to their roots in popular culture and literature. The superhero Batman, Martians, Sweeney Todd and Ed Wood's circus of freaks and ghouls, including Bela Lugosi and Vampyra, are a few examples of such popular borrowings. The only exceptions seem to be Vincent Malloy in *Vincent* (1982) and Edward in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), who are entirely original characters. Also, Burton's literary influences are fairly diverse: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*; Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*; Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Clearly, he is drawn to the classics of literature of the fantastic.

In a way, this interest in pop culture can also explain his popularity among theater audiences, especially among young viewers. Like Burton, young audiences have also absorbed their pop culture mainly from television or cinema and are well versed in multiple references and comments built into their films. There are several appearances by television in Burton's films. The first one was presented in his short-length film *Frankenweenie* (1984), when Burton depicts the character of Victor Frankenstein and his family watching Victor's home movies, in which Sparky, the family dog, is the star. In *Scissorhands*, Edward is invited to be the guest on a talk show that closely resembles The David Letterman Show. Meanwhile, Kim is watching Edward's feelings being exploited on TV. In *Mars Attacks!*, people from all over the world watch the Martians' landing on

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<sup>37</sup> This stunning image later became the symbol of Spielberg's film and television production company, Amblin Entertainment.

Earth and then killing the American armed forces on television. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, there is a TV room in Willy Wonka's chocolate factory.

Burton's unironic enthusiasm for junk culture is also probably the reason Burton has, with a few exceptions, been taken less seriously by critics, compared to filmmakers like David Lynch, for example. Caroline Thompson, the screenwriter of *Edward Scissorhands*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride*, compared the two directors in an interview with Frank Rose: "David's obsessions are the obsessions of a nineteen-year-old, and Tim's are the obsessions of a twelve-year-old. And this is much more of a twelve-year-old's culture." (Woods 63) Whereas David Lynch's work contains a massive charge of the erotic and the exploratory (typically associated with young adults or nineteen-year-olds), Burton's does not. Burton's erotic is the juvenile "crush" (typical of preadolescence) or the self-regarding *Why-does-nobody-love-me?* Burton's sexual explorations are familiarly developmental and Freudian, lacking Lynch's genuinely mystifying weirdness. Lynch's world is the world of fragmentation, demi-urges and the raw unconscious. His unique cinematic style is characterized by the usage of dreams and dreamlike imagery as well as meticulous sound design. Many of Lynch's films have been highly critically acclaimed including *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Unlike Burton's, his surrealist and, in many cases, violent films have proved uncommercial and unintelligible for many theatre audiences, *The Elephant Man* (1980) and *The Straight Story* (1999) being the exceptions.

On the DVD commentary of *Sleepy Hollow*, Burton also reinforced Caroline Thompson's statement by saying that Crane's character was the "first male action adventure hero who's portrayed like a thirteen-year old girl." (Burton, *Sleepy Hollow* DVD, 2000) By Burton's own account, the Martians in *Mars Attacks!* (1996) resemble naughty children and Earth seems to be their playground, "the Martians are simply anarchistic kids you can't understand. You don't really know what they want, there's really no clear motivation. They're just like bad, hyperactive children". (Smith & Matthews 206) The typical Burtonesque world is associated with preadolescent angst because it perpetuates teens' main worries such as feelings of misinterpretation, isolation and discomfort within one's skin or the eagerness to fit in. And these feelings are universal. Audiences have certainly identified with these feelings since the audience, like many of Burton's films, is also full of outcasts who feel unique and misunderstood and each viewer



adds his or her own personal dimension and interpretation to the picture they watch. That is also one of the reasons Burton's films have such a very wide fan-base.

Which is as much as to say that contemporary mainstream films are relentlessly teen-driven. Generally no matter what genre, all films are calculated to appeal to a teenage demographic. In a way, Burton was, by force of character, a harbinger of this type of cinema since he was one of the first filmmakers of his generation to insist that his main characters should convey teen obsessions and problems in order to target an audience that would include teen and young adults. In other words, Burton has been lucky in riding a trend or tendency which has suited his particular genius.

In another sense, this obsession with childhood or preadolescence has probably some connection with Burton's Americanness. The USA sees itself and is seen by other countries (especially European ones) as a relatively young country. Furthermore, the USA has always asserted its youthfulness by creating new legends or iconic symbols. These symbols perpetuate this idea of an ageless society or the cult of being forever young, by making heroes of energetic outsiders like Huck Finn, Holden Caulfield and Jay Gatsby. So, in this way, Burton is also chiming in with one of his country's more enduring cultural values.

However, the idea of childhood or preadolescence as symbolic of purity and innocence is not a modern or even an American concept. This idea was much in the minds and works of several late nineteenth and early twentieth century authors such as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll and J.M. Barrie. In a way, these authors' works reflect the Wordsworthian axiom that "the child is the father of the man"<sup>38</sup>, a central tenet of romanticism, inasmuch as the things we experience as children play a major role in how we perceive the world as adults. Since cinema is a quite modern art, it is only reasonable that it borrows some of its themes from other arts, especially literature. In relatively recent film productions, for instance, there is a proliferation of films that make the child their main dramatic focus. Besides Burton's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Alice in Wonderland*, films like the *Harry Potter* series or *The Chronicles of Narnia* are all about childhood, indeed, are children's classics. All of these films are also major franchises which were adapted from successful literary sources. However, the difference between

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<sup>38</sup> This phrase is from the poem "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold", also known as *The Rainbow* (1802) by William Wordsworth (1770-1850).

these two last films and Burton's films seems to be that Burton's films were loosely inspired by their literary sources. *Alice in Wonderland*, for instance, is not a faithful adaptation from Lewis Carroll's book of the same name. Indeed, it is not at all clear that it is intended for children. It is a Burtonian interpretation of the book instead. Burton portrays Alice as being on the threshold of womanhood. In order to become an adult, she needs to leave her childhood and her childish fantasies behind and decide exactly what she wants for her future life as an adult. Lewis Carroll's Alice, on the other hand, is the personification of perfect girlhood, with all its best qualities. The literary Alice is a wholly adequate and stable little girl and she doesn't need to change or grow up. Burton has tried to extrapolate from this literary character. But he is not altogether successful in his attempt since Alice turns out to be a secondary character, a foil for the Mad Hatter and his eccentricities. During her second journey to Wonderland, she even fails to develop the necessary personality traits of an opponent able to defeat the Red Queen. In the end, Alice turns into something you would not expect from Burton, a politically correct cliché. But then, he does not seem to be comfortable with a female protagonist.

. Many of Burton's misfits never really grow up into adulthood so they seem to suffer from *Peter Pan Syndrome*. The problem with any Burton film is that adulthood is seen as a form of villainy. The few Burtonian characters like Bruce Wayne in *Batman* or Benjamin Barker in *Sweeney Todd*, who grow up to be adults, become criminals or have a psychotic edge. In this way, the traumatized youth, the victim of violent crimes, develops into a killing machine. As adults, they search for revenge and develop a different understanding of the meaning of justice. In order to find justice, they ultimately need to mask themselves, as their motives are often cloaked from themselves. In *Batman* and its sequel, Bruce Wayne is a man who dresses up as a bat, a night creature, to fight crime. Benjamin Barker reinvents himself as Sweeney Todd, the barber in Fleet Street. Consequently, both characters develop an alter ego. By being Batman or Sweeney Todd, they can find personal relief in violence and pursue their homicidal designs with a marked disregard for society's laws and rules.

In this way, Burton's films explore two different attitudes towards childhood. On the one hand, Burton creates adult characters that keep their childhood "inside" and never really become grown-ups, thus, remaining innocent or having regressive behaviour. On

the other hand, those characters that reluctantly do grow up become perverse and self-divided individuals or ruthless killers.

Burton's characters based on comic books, like Bruce Wayne in *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992), are depicted as more anti-heroes than superheroes. Bruce Wayne is not portrayed as an entirely good character but as a complex character instead. Up until Burton's film *Batman*, it was unusual for films based on comic book fictional characters from Marvel or DC Comics to feature dark or driven characters. They were usually one-dimensional superheroes like in the *Superman* films (1978-83) and their vigilante missions were usually taken at face value. By using the dichotomy visual effect of light/ dark or day/night in his films, Burton was able to portray a character that shows a contrasting, conflicting personality: Bruce Wayne and his alter ego Batman. It is also a metaphor for childhood and adulthood. Burton depicted Bruce Wayne as an adult with responsibilities who seems frightened by the world he lives in and haunted by his parents' death. As Wayne, he is bound by social values not to act as a vigilante and trust in Gotham's justice system instead. As Batman, he safely returns to a childish state, plays with his latest toys and, because his true identity is hidden behind a mask, be as ruthless as any enemy he encounters and be a coldblooded murderer.

Burton's grim character and his dark tone turned *Batman* and *Batman Returns* into huge blockbusters. Burton's two films are unquestionably the most influential superhero films of recent times. In a way, *Batman* and *Batman Returns* were the precursors of the glut of films based on comic book characters, as they started the trend of producing dark superhero blockbusters whose characters shares the tortured personality and psychological depth of Burton's Batman. Some of the latest franchise films like Christopher Nolan's *Batman* trilogy (2005-12), Guillermo Del Toro's *Hellboy* (2004-08) and Brian Singer's *X-Men* (2000), and the subsequent films, are just some examples of today's taste for noir big-budget action films. Burton's creation has once again become something of a movie cliché.

I would argue that Burton's monster characters have some psychological depth. They are not one-dimensional bogeymen portrayed as bloodthirsty maniacs like the ones presented in slasher and splatter horror movies in the late 1970s and early 1980s like *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980) and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) or in recent films such as *Saw* (2004) and its sequels. With a few exceptions (*Sleepy Hollow*'s Headless Horseman, for example), many of Burton's characters have psychological depth. There is a

reason why they are who they are. Sweeney Todd or the Joker in *Batman* (1989) and Catwoman in *Batman Returns* (1992) are characters who have feelings and intrinsic psychological problems to solve. These characters are also depicted as cartoonish and mesmerizing, thus, becoming part of today's imaginary cinema. In a way, Burton's monsters can be perceived as an inspiration to other film directors' popular monster characters like the Lestat in *Interview with a Vampire* (1994) or Hannibal Lecter in *Hannibal* (2001).

Unlike traditional gothic horror films, many typical Burtonian characters are not real monsters<sup>39</sup>, although they are perceived as ones. Society perceives them as evil creatures because they are different and strange. They are naïve sympathetic misunderstood monsters who suffer from a physical deformity or emotional disability. Edward, for instance, is the most literal representation of an innocent Frankenstein-type monster. Due to the fact that he was created without hands, he can never literally touch or let himself be touched without inadvertently harming someone with his scissors. Thus, he is both isolated by the intolerance of a community (which brands him as a freak) and by his own choice so as to spare his own "heart" from grief. Sometimes it is their independent thinking and unusual creativity or intelligence that lead them not to be truly understood as exemplified by Willy Wonka or Ichabod Crane.

Burton's films, *Mars Attacks!* and *Planet of the Apes*, are exceptions to his portrayal of misunderstood outcast characters to date. They are not about the usual outcast's struggle for acceptance by society and they are not built around Burton's preoccupations with the dichotomy: childhood/adulthood. Instead, it seems that in these films, Burton is mostly concerned to explore the conflict between individualism and collectivity inasmuch as it is about the individual and his struggle with a politically oppressive society. Burton focuses on society itself, on its dark, authoritarian and inhuman aspects in general and on American society in particular. In *Mars Attacks!* and *Planet of the Apes*, collective society takes the form of an outsider invader: the Martians and the talking Apes. Both Martian and Ape society are portrayed as having authoritarian regimes

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<sup>39</sup> The word "monster" derives from the latin *mostrare*, "to show". Several theorists claim that in horror films monsters are created, not born and they exist to teach audiences a lesson by showing an object of fear and revulsion. At some level, they act out our own unacknowledged desires. In Langford, Barry. "The Horror Film". *Film Genre: Hollywood and beyond*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, cop. 2005. chapter 7, pp.166-68

that attempt to eliminate the human race. More unusually, Burton attempts to impose this totalitarian template on Alice's Wonderland as well, but to no very useful effect.

The human individuals that fight these fascist societies are depicted as independent thinkers or arrogant rebels. They only survive and eventually prevail over these dictatorial societies because they are non-conformists who usually reject society's conservative ways of being. Burton clearly approves these characters' individual attitudes towards society. In *Mars Attacks!*, country boy Ritchie Norris works in a donut shop. He is seen as a loser by his own family because he neither shares their so-called American suburban patriotic beliefs nor enlists like his brother in the army. He saves humankind when he realizes that the Martians can be killed by Slim Whitman's song "Indian Love Call". Indeed, it turns out to be lethal to them as on hearing it their heads explode. It seems that the Martians metaphorically represent many of American society's negative traits because they embrace rationalism, scientific progress and technology. After all, and according to one of the characters, Professor Kessler, they look very unfamiliar due to their highly developed brains. One can assume the Martians are also scientifically and technologically advanced. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the song "Indian Love Call" that eventually kills the Martians makes an indirect reference to the Western colonization of America and its subsequent eradication of many Native American tribes.

In *Planet of the Apes*, Leo Davidson, a human space-traveler, doesn't follow his crew's rules, disobeys direct orders and follows his lost chimpanzee into outer space in order to rescue him. Later on, he is clearly seen as a savior of the human tribe since he plans to free the human slaves and escape into the Forbidden Area, thereby saving them from the Apes' oppressive rule.

Burton's misunderstood characters are usually warm and empathic. Edward Scissorhands, Edward Bloom and Willy Wonka are highly likeable in their eccentricities and the audience ends up sympathizing with them. By contrast with these characters, Burton fails to express Richie and Leo's inner psychological conflict with society as well as their real motivations. Both heroes seem insensitive to whatever happens either to their family (Richie) or to the human tribe (Leo). Consequently, Richie and Leo are characters lacking emotional depth and so are unable to create empathy and a connection with the audience.

Both films are Burton's unsuccessful attempts to produce political and social criticism of established governments. In fact, Burton has so far had little success in producing critically and commercial successful works with an open political agenda. In *Planet of the Apes*, the script underwent numerous changes during the filming in order to keep production within budget. As a result, Burton failed to produce a good sustainable and credible script.

In *Mars Attacks!*, the Martians are regarded as monsters. In his interviews, Burton has always been very specific about whose side he is on in conflicts between monsters and people. Burton clearly sides with the monsters because they have "much more heartfelt souls than the human characters around them". (Salisbury 3) But the Martians are not depicted as likeable characters with deep feelings. They kill indiscriminately in a careless and unsympathetic violent manner for no apparent reason. Perhaps the reason is just to have some fun; like *The Goonies* (1983), they exist to make mischief. Furthermore, the Martians' actual intentions, motives and culture remain unknown to the human characters and audience. Burton failed to represent their culture or lifestyle and behavior in a way that could be intelligible to humans. Consequently, the Martians were perceived as simply odd by cinema viewers. The Martians' (and Burton's) peculiar sense of humor is lost or not shared, resulting in confusion and alienation among the film's viewers. The Martians may share Burton's wacky sense of humor, but they do not have his empathy. Ed Wood and Pee-Wee Herman might be looked upon as Martians of some sort as well. However, these characters clearly have Burton's empathy and that is probably one of the reasons why they were successful among cinema audiences and reviewers alike.

Burton also fails in making credible narratives where quirky characters like Ritchie can be the savior of the normal. Unfortunately, and unlike for instance David Cronenberg, Burton is unable to establish either a real struggle between philosophies or species. Where Cronenberg is neutral between the competing interests of different species, Burton is commercially constrained to support the interests of people against the Martians/Apes because his films have the same genre logic as *Independence Day* (1986) and *War of the Worlds* (2005). The human race should be able to endure and overcome any alien threat through love, unity and the brotherhood of people. These feelings are intrinsically human and the postulate is that intellectually superior species lack them, so they do not deserve to prevail. Burton accepts the premise of human exceptionalism, Cronenberg does not.

It seems that Burton's successful films are the ones which are based on individuals and their personal and emotional struggle against society. His talent doesn't lie in his concern about social and political issues. His great creativity is best revealed when he portrays the mental and physical isolation of the male protagonist.

While it is accurate to say that Burton has been constantly faithful to his regular actors, it is also true that he has been inconstant in respect of his leading actresses, since most of them have appeared once or twice in any Burton's feature film. Some of them, however, have delivered impressive performances in his films as supporting characters, like Winona Ryder as Kim in *Edward Scissorhands*, Christina Ricci as Katrina in *Sleepy Hollow*, Helena Bonham Carter as Ari in *Planet of the Apes* and Alison Lohman as Sandra Templeton in *Big Fish*. Either vulnerable and fragile or aggressive and independent, most of them convey the misunderstood character's vision of an ideal female figure. All these female characters belong to the established society that the main male character wishes to fit into, but, at the same time, they defy society's rules by coming to the rescue of the misunderstood leading male. They portray the romantic interest for the hero and his antagonist, but more significantly, as sidekick girl companions, they provide social rather than sexual validation.

Burtonian women are also a little different from the typical gothic or fairy tale heroines since they are not portrayed either scary or powerful. For instance, in a traditional fairy tale, a typical hero is usually set on a quest. On this quest, he is bound to encounter a kind of female creature (a nymph or a fairy for example) who offers him her knowledge and experience in order to overcome some difficult tasks. He eventually saves a village or a girl (usually a princess) whom he ends up marrying. Alternatively, the hero encounters a dangerous woman, a witch who cunningly plans to undermine his quest. This confrontation with a witch is an important stage in the hero's journey because it can symbolize the battle for deliverance from dependence on mother and thus growth into adulthood and maturity.

Many of Burton's male characters, however, do not become adult heroes since they never seem to grow up or outgrow their childhood obsessions or infantile complexes. Male characters' quests are often depicted as scientific pursuits. That is to say, male characters are encouraged to pursue further knowledge. Often this pursuit leads the male character to either live in seclusion (Willy Wonka) or leave his social surroundings. Edward Bloom in *Big Fish*, for instance, leaves his village to seek his fortune. Burton's female characters are

more often patient and uncomplaining rather than enterprising. They are usually portrayed as Gothic angels such as Kim in *Edward Scissorhands*, Sally in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Katrina in *Sleepy Hollow*, Sandra in *Big Fish*. Even when they seem to be more aggressive or harmful like Catwoman in *Batman Returns* or the Martian girl in *Mars Attacks!*, they stay in the background of the male character's story, as they are not really significant for his true emotional development or his quest.

Following the horror film traditions from which Burton took much of his inspiration, the mother figure is strikingly absent in many of his films. This absence has its origin during the main character's childhood or preadolescence, when the mother suddenly dies. The premature death of the mother is a recurrent feature in Burton films. It happens to Bruce Wayne's, Ichabod Crane's and Willy Wonka's mother. Due to this traumatic event in these characters' lives, Burtonian male characters feel inadequate and unprepared to live in society.

So there are almost no satisfactory mothers in his films. On the few occasions when the mother figure is shown, she is portrayed as an indifferent or unsupportive figure like Delia Deitz in *Beetlejuice* or First Lady Marsha Dale in *Mars Attacks!*. Burton's mother figure can only be found as a surrogate or borrowed mother. For instance, Katrina in *Sleepy Hollow* takes care of Ichabod Crane during his illness as a mother would. Peggy Boggs and Mrs. Lovett show a motherly affection for young Edward in *Scissorhands* and Tobias in *Sweeney Todd* respectively. It seems the only exceptions to the rule are Jessica Lange's Sandra Bloom senior in *Big Fish* and Charlie's mother, Mrs. Bucket, in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The reason behind this negative representation of mothers seems to rest with Burton's strained relationship with his own mother.

### **3. A working relationship within the Hollywood studio system**

Tim Burton is one of a very few directors (Spielberg and Scorsese also) at the very top of his profession. He works inside Hollywood's studio system but he also manages to produce personal, independent and artistically creative films. Burton's films are private in the sense that they communicate his personal interests and are populated with his childhood idols, ghosts and memories. *Big Fish*, a film about the death of a father in which



the son tries to finally understand and accept him, was produced two years after the death of Burton's own father and shows the director's own attempts at reconciliation. Although he displays such private and biographical elements, his films are enthusiastically watched by millions of people.

Despite being part of the Hollywood system, he often feels like an outsider in that world, stating that, "for a community made up of so many freakish outsiders, [Hollywood]'s oddly conservative." (Salisbury 84) For that reason, it is strange to think that some critics once regarded him as the "new Spielberg". The only thing the two have in common, aside from being considered prodigies or "*wunderkinds*" early in their careers, is that they both need writers and sources; they hardly ever write the stories for their films.

Burton loved the earlier film of *Planet of the Apes* (1968) with Charlton Heston and explained that the reason behind his decision to make *Planet of the Apes* (2001) was based on "a perverse fascination of attempting something you shouldn't do." (Salisbury 188) In press conferences about the film, Burton often emphasized that he wasn't making a remake of the film but another version of the same issue or subject matter: human species being ruled by talking Apes. After *The Planet of the Apes*' release, however, many reviewers expected more than just a popcorn film and protested that Burton's project was his most conventional; it seemed specifically designed to be a huge money-maker. Other reviewers complained that Burton seemed not to be concerned about a good plot, as the development of the film's characters was weak and it contained a sloppy ending. Actually, Burton seems not to cope well with mainstream big budget films. His opinion about this subject has been publicly expressed and his working experience with the studio producers is less than flattering. By Burton's own account, they are largely responsible for *Planet of the Apes*' bad critical reception, saying "they give you a script, and do a budget based on that, and say, 'this movie could cost \$300m to make,' and then they treat you like a crazy, overspending, crazy person!" (Smith & Matthews 272) In other words, for Burton, Hollywood studio executives' pressure to over-hastily release a film with a fixed budget was the main reason for the film's commercial and critical failure.

Despite the above opinion, Tim Burton has already worked for most major Hollywood studios: Warner Brothers, Disney/Touchstone Pictures, Paramount Pictures, Columbia Pictures and Twentieth Century Fox. Eight of his films, including *Batman*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Sweeney Todd*, (Fig.13) were produced by Warner

Brothers. *Sleepy Hollow* was financed by Paramount Picture. *Big Fish* is a Columbia Pictures production. Tom Rothman, president of the Twentieth Century Fox, who hired Burton to direct *Edward Scissorhands*, once stated that “Tim is a unique, individualistic, iconoclastic filmmaker.” (Salisbury 188) Although he is respected and highly praised by major studio figures, Burton has always generated dissenting opinions and enjoyed a tempestuous relationship with the studios he has worked for. This friction is related with his struggle to preserve his unique vision. At the same time he has been largely indifferent to money considerations (which has in no way freed him from the obligation to keep to the studio’s budget). Burton more than once commented that “every movie I’ve made has been with a studio, and I keep going through these nightmare-type things. And each time I go ‘Why?’ It’s the world I know, but it’s not a world I’m particularly fond of.” (Salisbury 261) Burton often claims to have an aversion to bureaucrats and other studio establishment figures and so fights to maintain a respectful distance from the Hollywood studios he has worked for.



Fig.13 Tim Burton on the set of his film version of Stephen Sondheim’s musical *Sweeney Todd* (2007).

Early on Burton’s career as a filmmaker, while he was working for Disney, the studio company accused him of making films too dark for children moviegoers. Consequently, his films got PG ratings (Parental Guidance Suggested) and went against the company’s policy at the time when their films were always G-rated (General Audiences) by the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) film-rating system. Thereafter, a disenchanted Burton found the atmosphere so stifling that he eventually left the studio in the mid 1980s, after *Frankenweenie*, his black and white short film, got a PG rating, was dismissed and shelved by Disney. Despite their stressful relationship, Burton has been involved with Disney studios in later film projects: *The Nightmare Before Christmas*

(1993), *Ed Wood* (1994) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010). Not surprisingly, the modern Disney studio has come round to Burton's way of thinking, having changed its policy since the early 1990s, and is now producing films which include a darker tone. *Pirates of the Caribbean*, for example, is full of ghosts and other ghoulish supernatural characters surrounded by gloomy atmospheres.

Sometimes perceived as "a crazy kind of loose cannon" (Salisbury 55) by some studio producers, Tim Burton has always defended his artistic ideas against Hollywood's naked profit motive. Contemporary films, for instance, must be in color, not black and white, for sale to television and to please viewers who simply refuse to watch black and white films. *Ed Wood* was therefore considered as a high risk project, a liability at the box office, because it was shot in black and white. Burton fought against the studio at the time, Columbia Pictures, in order to maintain his vision of the film and his artistic integrity. His decision to shoot the film in black and white led Columbia Pictures to withdraw from the project. However, Disney studios, seeing an opportunity to be reconciled with their runaway and gifted ex-protégé, decided to pick the project up and produce it. At the time, few films reverting to black and white were made. The few that were tended to be critically acclaimed and major box office hits. Before Burton's film, Peter Bogdanovich's *Last Picture Show* (1971), Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980) and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler List* (1993) were both notable critical successes and commercial films<sup>40</sup>.

One of the reasons Burton decided to live in Europe, particularly in London, was due to the fact that he had felt challenged and misunderstood by studio producers and American reviewers, whenever his film projects received mixed reviews or failed at the box office. For instance, after *Mars Attacks!* drew fierce criticism from the American press, Burton claimed that European audiences and critics "understood it [the film] much better or seemed to get it better" since they "didn't seem to have that American egotism of, 'you can make fun of things, but you can't quite make fun of other things.'" (Salisbury 153).

Despite his apparent defiance, and tempestuous relationship with studio executives, Burton has respect for the people whose job it is to discipline the movie-making process and willingly acknowledges his financial responsibility for his work by stating:

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<sup>40</sup> Recently, the retro black and white French film *The Artist* (2011) falls into this category.

“I’ve never taken the attitude of the artiste, who says I don’t care about anything, I’m just making my movie. I try to be true to myself and do only what I can do, because if I veer from that everybody’s in trouble. And when there is a large amount of money involved, I attempt, without pretending to know what audiences are about, to try and do something that people would like to see, without going too crazy.”

(Woods 51)

Burton is reluctant to be labeled as a franchising or a hire-on-demand director. However, he has agreed to make blockbusters and franchise films for Hollywood studios like *Batman*, *Batman Returns* and *Planet of the Apes*. Although animation films appeal to his artistic sensibilities, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride* have been turned into highly profitable films and the creations from these films have indeed become franchised products which are sold widely.

He once stated that he “could only work on one film at a time” (Salisbury 127) as working on more than one is quite a distressing, confusing situation he would prefer to avoid. But, professional demands being what they are, he has been simultaneously involved with two film projects, *Batman Returns* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* in 1992. Additionally, he shot both *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Corpse Bride* in 2005. Recently, he has directed *Dark Shadows* (2012) and *Frankenweenie* (2012) at the same time. Therefore, his statement reflects a preference, not a practice. Burton seems to embody the talented director that has a complex relationship with his work.

Overall, Burton has the ability to create new worlds that are both conceptually and visually rich and have myth-like underlying structures and to tell stories which employ popular understandings of Freudian developmental dilemmas. To put this another way, he is also able to tell ordinary stories about misunderstood social outcasts whose feelings are universal. Despite his reputation as an unconventional and dark filmmaker, Burton has enjoyed great commercial success within the very film industry he often seems so wary of. Moreover, his ability to strike a tenuous but successful balance between being a hire-on-demand studio director, making big budget Hollywood films, and being a film *auteur*-director with a peculiar and powerful imagination, is what makes Burton a maverick original.

## Conclusion – Final Considerations

For almost thirty years, Tim Burton has been regarded as a maverick director by Hollywood standards. He is a visionary director inasmuch as he sees strange things not far in the distance, but close by, under the guise of the familiar. His characters are people, only with a twist. His fantastic world closely mirrors everyday life, only it is more grotesque. Burton reminds his viewers that the cute and the quaint is one step away from the cruel or the morbid.

By creating powerful visually striking settings, imaginative alternative universes and quirky social outcasts, Burton was perceived as an outsider early on in his career. He belonged to the 1980s Hollywood's filmmaking counterculture that included such young talented directors as Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and Brian de Palma. Like Burton, many of these directors were brought up in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time well-known for its social and cultural revolution in the United States. Unsurprisingly, in order to produce creative works, they drew their inspiration from their own childhood memories which, in turn, were based on the 1950s and 1960s pop cultural television and cinema.

Burton's directorial skills were, however, honed when he first started to work for the Disney studio in the 1980s. Since then, his films have been produced by major Hollywood studios such as Warner Brothers or Twentieth-Century Fox. *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and *Frankenweenie* (2012) are Disney productions and Burton's latest collaboration with the Mickey Mouse studio. Coincidentally or not, Burton has never worked in the independent film industry like Cronenberg or Lynch. As a matter of fact, on each feature he has made so far, Burton seems to have become more accommodated to working on more commercial mainstream films. Although Burton and his peers fought against the Hollywood studio system at the beginning of their careers, they have turned out to be increasingly mainstream directors, thus working inside the studio system and being rewarded for it. Consequently, Burton has become part of Hollywood mainstream culture. Although he still thinks himself as a marginal director living outside Hollywood, Burton is, indeed, one of the most powerful and influential people in the American film industry. Actually, one may argue that, in retrospect, one of his films' most astonishing features is the skill with which the director was able to take on multi-million dollars projects and

infuse them with his own particular interests and obsessions, resulting in profitable blockbusters.

Undoubtedly, Burton has had some influence on the modern film industry over the last two decades. Not only was he one of the few directors responsible for the revitalization of stop-motion techniques in Hollywood feature-length pictures, but he also inverted fairy-tales story-telling narrative codes as well. Moreover, he helped to develop American modern gothic cinema. Clearly, Burton's films have advanced the traditions of gothic art by bringing its styles and themes into mainstream film productions. In his filmography, there is a consistent gothic iconography, made up of mysterious and gloomy atmospheres, dark and labyrinthine magical forests and castles, supernatural elements and references to literary and cinematic gothic horror, in particular to Hammer films and Roger Corman-Vincent Price horror films. His films include not only carefully conceived grotesque visual effects, but also macabre humor and a predilection for the darker side of human life.

Burton seems to have found the formula for making a successful film early on in his career with his short films and *Beetlejuice*. He managed to perfect this formula later on in *Edward Scissorhands* by externalizing the internal struggles of his misunderstood social outcast character with extreme imagery and the use of spectacular costumes, make up and masks. Burton's stereotypical characters (misunderstood monsters), along with many of his recurrent themes and trademarks, have turned out to be so popular that they have become something of a movie-cliché nowadays. They have become conventional, as is exemplified by the various dark tortured comic book characters in today's neo-noir big budget superhero action films or by the innumerable vampires and other supernatural characters in American modern gothic films.

Burton's films convey his childhood interests and obsessions and, in a way, seem to be autobiographical. That's why he is often compared to the characters in his movies - he even shares his hair-style with many of them. Vincent and Edward Scissorhands are the most recognizable ones. Many of his leading characters are depicted as childlike misfits and are unable to communicate their inner feelings or fail to fit in satisfactorily in their surrounding society.

Burton's obsession with childlike characters and the idea of adolescent angst can also be perceived as some kind of limitation on his art. Burton has been able to produce a string of immature male characters that never grow up and so miss out on the complexity

and compromise of maturity. That's one of the reasons why his following is largely youthful.

Burton is also a director actors seem to love, many of whom sign on to his films purely for the opportunity to work with him. That seems to have been Depp's case. Burton and Depp share similar interests, a similar love for horror films and a desire to bring the unusual and peculiar to life. On the personal level, both men have long-lasting relationships with their life-partners, with whom they have a couple of children. Both artists live in Europe and consider themselves outsiders and non-conformists since they don't fully accept commercial cinema's value system. The closeness of their personal relationship parallels the closeness of their professional one. This is not to suggest that these men never argue or disagree. Still it was the professionalism of both that fuels their personal relationship.

Nonetheless, as an originating artist, Burton seems to be weirder than Depp. Whereas Burton has dealt with the same themes and obsessions in his films, Depp, as an interpreting artist, has sought films that can be utterly different and challenging thematically. Depp has played versatile characters that can be poles apart from one another. Meanwhile, Burton's obsession with immature characters deepens on one level, but limits his films on another. Indeed, this obsession is unique in contemporary cinema. Both artists live normal lives and seem to be very accessible people. But Burton perhaps is less so than Depp, because many of his films like *Mars Attacks!* or *Sweeney Todd* are comically violent and dark in tone. As a result, some of Burton's films have a bizarre register like *Ed Wood* and are hard for more mature mass audiences to place.

In all the eight films Burton and Depp have worked on together to date, Depp has tended to play the same character: the eccentric childlike misunderstood outcast. In fact, Burton has been able to develop, explore and refine this archetypal character in his filmic universe using many different names in various settings. Additionally, Depp's portrayal of this type of character has been more and more histrionic. Although his over-the-top performances have become more appreciated by teen audiences, they have also become progressively less challenging, and thus have received less critical praise. Depp's association with Burton has been successful from the beginning. However, their work together has become less original over the years, because Burton's static character conceptions demand ever more strident representations, that is to say, broader and broader

performances. Depp's tendency to over-act, or to self-parody, parallels the use of CGI effects to trump what was already achieved more modestly in previous films. Although they still enjoy a strong and very commercially successful partnership, it is not so much an artistically productive one. Nonetheless, they are still considered one of the most powerful working teams in film production today.

Without Depp, Burton's films would still be Burton films, with his stamp and signature on them, such as we find with, say, *Big Fish*. They would still have the same themes and obsessions Burton is so fond of. Their gothic myth-like atmospheres and musical ambience would still recognizably make them Burton films. Indeed, when Burton shot *Beetlejuice* and *Batman*, he was already regarded as a one-off, a few years before he had Johnny Depp on board as his onscreen alter ego. On the other hand, Depp would probably have gone on a successful TV actor for a while. The indications are that he would have exited the acting profession had he not found the stimulation which working with Burton gave him.

Depp has clearly given some of his best acting performances in Burton films. Undoubtedly, Burton and Depp are a better working together than separately. It is the combination of Burton's visual aesthetic and striking imagery and Depp's ability to take on the role of Burton's onscreen alter ego, with his chameleonic and charismatic acting prowess, that has brought about their mutual success. Together they have created original, fascinating and empathetic characters like Edward Scissorhands, Ichabod Crane and Willy Wonka.

Burton's style of filmmaking has not changed over the years. He still explores the same themes and obsessions mostly through gothic and fantasy (fairy-tale) genres. Indeed, his work has not expanded much beyond these genres. Beyond his visual inventiveness, Burton doesn't really stray very far from his central concerns, as is exemplified by his latest full-length animated feature *Frankenweenie* (2012), a remake of his own 1984 short film with the same title. Only a certain kind of artist remakes his own films. Both films are about a deceased childhood pet, a dachshund that becomes a zombie-dog. They both draw upon Burton's childhood memories of his own scientific experiments on his dog. Like many of his films, they also make literary and cinematic allusions to Mary Shelley's famous book and the 1931 film *Frankenstein*. What compelled him to remake such a minor work? Is he trying to relive his most inspired and richest period as a director working for



Disney or is he reanimating one of the most important relationships of his early life? That the film is a Disney production is not a coincidence. Is he in a rut? Does this reflect creative bankruptcy on Burton's part? He has tended to be a less audacious and challenging director recently than he was early on in his career. Perhaps his best recent film, *Sweeney Todd*, has required a powerful revenge motif and surprisingly strong musical performances to break pre-existing moulds. Burton career as a director seems to be stagnating, his work becoming more and more regressive. It has definitely become more chaotic and inchoate, like his *Alice* or *Dark Shadows*, despite the fact that they seem to be major commercial successes. Whether he can turn a corner and come up with something fresh and unexpected is still to be seen. At the moment, the caption "A Tim Burton Film" means something fairly predictable.

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<<http://www.indepth.com/>> Online access: 13 Nov.2011

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Online access: 13 Nov.2011

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## **Filmography (Tim Burton):**

*Vincent*, 1982, USA, 5m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Tim Burton/ Walt Disney Pictures

Cast: Vincent Price (narrator)

*Hansel and Gretel*, 1982, USA, 45m (TV episode)

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Julie Hickson

Cast: Michael Yama

*Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp*, 1984, USA, 47m (TV episode)

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Lion's Gate Company

Cast: Robert Carradine, James Earl Jones, Leonard Nimoy

*Frankenweenie*, 1984, USA, 25m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Walt Disney Pictures

Cast: Shelley Duvall, Daniel Stern

*Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, 1985, USA, 90m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Warner Brothers

Cast: Paul Reubens/ Pee-Wee Herman

*Beetlejuice*, 1988, USA, 92m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: The Geffen Company

Cast: Michael Keaton, Alec Baldwin, Geena Davis, Wynona Ryder

*Batman*, 1989, USA, 126m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Warner Brothers

Cast: Jack Nicholson, Michael Keaton, Kim Basinger

*Edward Scissorhands*, 1990, USA, 105m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Twentieth Century Fox

Cast: Johnny Depp, Dianne Wiest, Winona Ryder, Vincent Price

*Batman Returns*, 1992, USA, 126m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Warner Brothers

Cast: Michael Keaton, Michelle Pfeiffer, Danny De Vito, Christopher Walken



*Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas*, 1993, USA, 76m

Director: Henry Selick

Production: Touchstone Pictures/ Tim Burton

Cast: Danny Elfman (singing voice), Catherine O'Hara, Paul Reubens

*Ed Wood*, 1994, USA, 127m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Touchstone Pictures

Cast: Johnny Depp, Martin Landau, Sarah Jessica Parker, Jeffrey Jones

*Mars Attacks!*, 1996, USA, 106m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Warner Brothers

Cast: Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close, Annette Bening, Pierce Brosnan, Sarah Jessica Parker

*Sleepy Hollow*, 1999, USA, 104m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Paramount Pictures/ Scott Rudin Productions/ Mandalay Pictures

Cast: Johnny Depp, Christina Ricci, Christopher Walken, Miranda Richardson, Christopher Lee

*Planet of the Apes*, 2001, USA/UK, 120m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Twentieth Century Fox/ Zanuck Company

Cast: Mark Wahlberg, Tim Roth, Helena Bonham Carter, Paul Giamatti

*Big Fish*, 2003, USA, 125m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Columbia Pictures/ Zanuck Company

Cast: Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney, Billy Crudup, Jessica Lange, Helena Bonham Carter

*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, 2005, USA/UK, 115m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Columbia Pictures

Cast: Johnny Depp, Freddie Highmore, Helena Bonham Carter, Christopher Lee

*Tim Burton's Corpse Bride*, 2005, USA, 87m

Director: Tim Burton e Mike Johnson

Production: Warner Brothers

Cast voices: Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, Emily Watson, Tracey Ullman

*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, 2007, USA, 116m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: DreamWorks Pictures, Warner Brothers

Cast: Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, Alan Rickman, Timothy Spall

*Alice in Wonderland*, 2010, USA/UK, 108m

Director: Tim Burton

Production: Walt Disney Pictures  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Mia Wasikowska, Helena Bonham Carter, Anne Hathaway

*Dark Shadows*, 2012, USA/UK, 108m  
Director: Tim Burton  
Production: Warner Brothers  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Eva Green, Michelle Pfeiffer, Helena Bonham Carter

*Frankenweenie*, 2012, USA, 88m  
Director: Tim Burton  
Production: Walt Disney/ Tim Burton  
Cast: Winona Ryder, Martin Landau, Catherine O'Hara

### **Selected Filmography (Johnny Depp):**

*A Nightmare on Elm Street*, 1984, USA, 91m  
Director: Wes Craven  
Production: New Line  
Cast: Heather Langenkamp, Johnny Depp

*Slow Burn*, 1986, USA, 92m  
Director: Matthew Chapman  
Production: Universal  
Cast: Eric Roberts, Beverly D'Angelo, Johnny Depp

*21 Jump Street*, 1987-1991, USA, (TV series)  
Director: several directors, including Kim Manners  
Production: Fox Television  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Frederic Forrest, Peter DeLuise

*Cry Baby*, 1990, USA, 85m  
Director: John Waters  
Production: Universal  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Amy Locane, Ricki Lake, Iggy Pop

*What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, 1993, USA, 118m  
Director: Lasse Hallström  
Production: Paramount Pictures  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Leonardo DiCaprio, Juliette Lewis

*Benny & Joon*, 1993, USA, 98m  
Director: Jeremiah Chechik  
Production: MGM  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Mary Stuart Masterson, Aidan Quinn, Julianne Moore  
*Arizona Dream*, 1993, USA, 142m

Director: Emir Kusturica  
Production: Warner Brothers  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Jerry Lewis, Faye Dunaway, Lili Taylor

*Nick of Time*, 1995, USA, 90m  
Director: John Badham  
Production: Paramount Pictures  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Christopher Walken, Charles S. Dutton

*Dead Man*, 1995, USA, 121m  
Director: Jim Jarmusch  
Production: Miramax  
Cast: Johnny Depp, John Hurt, Alfred Molina, Robert Mitchum, Iggy Pop

*Don Juan DeMarco*, 1995, USA, 97m  
Director: Jeremy Leven  
Production: New Line  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Marlon Brando, Faye Dunaway

*Donnie Brasco*, 1997, USA, 127m  
Director: Mike Newell  
Production: Sony/Tristar  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Al Pacino, Michael Madsen, Anne Heche

*The Brave*, 1997, USA, 123m  
Director: Johnny Depp  
Production: Magestic  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Marlon Brando

*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, 1998, USA, 118m  
Director: Terry Gilliam  
Production: Universal  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Benicio Del Toro

*The Astronaut's Wife*, 1999, USA, 109m  
Director: Rand Ravich  
Production: New Line  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Charlize Theron

*The Ninth Gate*, 1999, USA/France/Spain, 133m  
Director: Roman Polanski  
Production: Artisan Entertainment  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Frank Langella, Lena Olin, Emmanuelle Seigner

*The Source*, 1999, USA, 88m (documentary)  
Director: Chuck Workman  
Production: Winstar  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Dennis Hopper, John Turturro

*Chocolat*, 2000, USA/UK, 121m

Director: Lasse Hallström

Production: Miramax

Cast: Juliette Binoche, Alfred Molina, Lena Olin, Judie Dench, Johnny Depp

*Before Night Falls*, 2000, USA, 133m

Director: Julian Schnabel

Production: Fine Line Features

Cast: Javier Bardem, Olivier Martinez, Johnny Depp

*From Hell*, 2001, USA, 122m

Director: Albert Hughes, Allen Hughes

Production: Twentieth Century Fox

Cast: Johnny Depp, Ian Holm, Heather Graham

*Blow*, 2001, USA, 124m

Director: Ted Demme

Production: New Line

Cast: Johnny Depp, Penelope Cruz, Franka Potente

*Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, 2003, USA, 102m

Director: Robert Rodriguez

Production: Columbia Pictures/ Dimension

Cast: Antonio Banderas, Johnny Depp, Mickey Rourke, Salma Hayek, Eva Mendes

*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, 2003, USA, 143m

Director: Gore Verbinski

Production: Disney/Buena Vista

Cast: Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Keira Knightley, Orlando Bloom

*Finding Neverland*, 2004, USA, 101m

Director: Marc Forster

Production: Miramax

Cast: Johnny Depp, Kate Winslet, Dustin Hoffman, Freddie Highmore

*Secret Window*, 2004, USA, 96m

Director: David Koepp

Production: Columbia Pictures

Cast: Johnny Depp, John Turturro, Maria Bello, Timothy Hutton

*The Libertine*, 2004, UK/Australia, 110m

Director: Laurence Dunmore

Production: Odyssey

Cast: Johnny Depp, John Malkovich, Samantha Morton

*Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, 2006, USA, 150m

Director: Gore Verbinski

Production: Disney/Buena Vista  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Keira Knightley, Orlando Bloom, Bill Nighy

*Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, 2007, USA, 187m  
Director: Gore Verbinski  
Production: Disney/Buena Vista  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Keira Knightley, Orlando Bloom, Bill Nighy

*Public Enemies*, 2009, USA, 143m  
Director: Michael Mann  
Production: Universal  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Christian Bale, Marion Cotillard

*The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, 2009, Canada/France/UK, 123m  
Director: Terry Gilliam  
Production: Lions Gate  
Cast: Christopher Plummer, Heath Ledger, Johnny Depp, Colin Farrell, Jude Law

*The Tourist*, 2010, USA, 103m  
Director: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck  
Production: GK/Spyglass/Columbia Pictures  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Angelina Jolie, Paul Bettany, Timothy Dalton

*When You're Strange*, 2010, USA, 86m (documentary)  
Director: Tom DiCillo  
Production: Rhino Entertainment/Wolf Films  
Cast: Johnny Depp (narrator)

*Rango*, 2011, USA, 107m  
Director: Gore Verbinski  
Production: GK/Paramount Pictures  
Cast Voices: Johnny Depp, Isla Fisher, Alfred Molina

*Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, 2011, USA, 136m  
Director: Rob Marshall  
Production: Disney/Bruckheimer  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Geoffrey Rush, Penelope Cruz, Ian McShane

*The Rum Diary*, 2011, USA, 120m  
Director: Bruce Robinson  
Production: GK/Infinitum Nihil/Warner Brothers  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Aaron Eckhart, Giovanni Ribisi, Richard Jenkins

*Lone Ranger*, 2013, USA  
Director: Gore Verbinski  
Production: Disney/Bruckheimer  
Cast: Johnny Depp, Armie Hammer, Helena Bonham Carter

## Illustrations:

Fig. 1. Burton's first short stop-motion picture and film debut as a director, *Vincent* (1982).Page 6. <<http://www.imaginarycinema.com/burton.html>>

Fig. 2. Boris Karloff as the monster in James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931). Page 7. Photo: Alami <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>>

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Photo: Everett Collection / Rex Features <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>>

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